

By the same author



COME TO DUST

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N O M A D.

By
ROBIN MAUGHAM

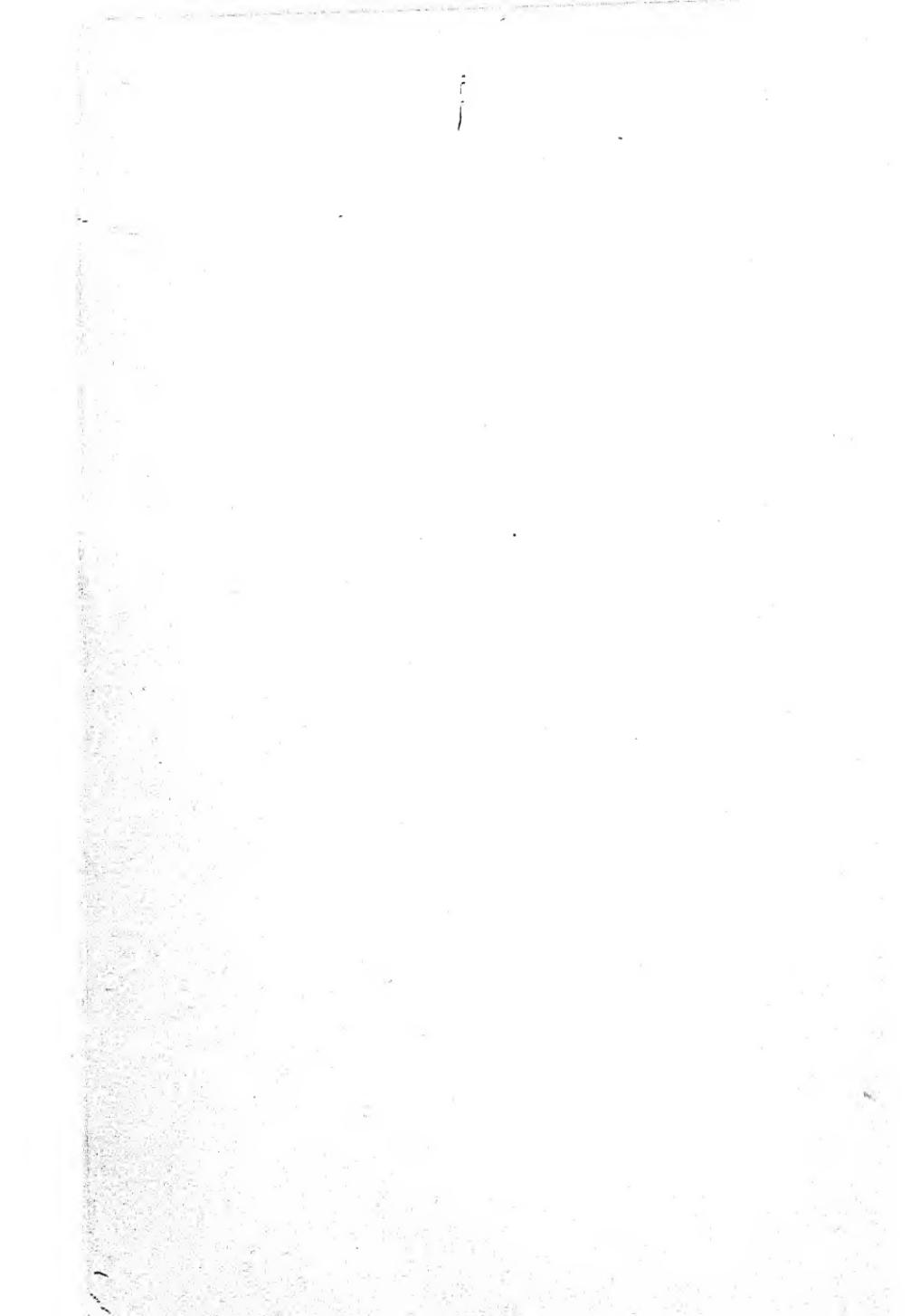
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TO THOSE WHO WERE WOUNDED AND LIVED,
BUT CANNOT TELL THEIR TALE



BOOK ONE

“ It is no concern of the thoughtful traveller’s whether what he says is familiar or strange, agreeable or unacceptable, to the prejudiced or to the wise. His only concern is to keep his fidelity to truth and man: to say simply, and if he can, fearlessly, what he has learned and concluded. If he be mistaken, his errors will be all the less pernicious for being laid open to correction. If he be right, there will be so much accession, be it little or much, to the wisdom of mankind. Either way, he will have discharged his errand; and it is so important to him to have done that, that he will think little in comparison of how his avowals will be received by any man, or any number of men.”

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

I

The lean doctor stood by the side of the bed.

“How long has the drain tube been out?”

“Six days now,” Sister said in her cold, hard voice.

“Let’s have a look at it.”

Sister began to unwind the bandage so quickly that I stiffened in expectation of pain. But she seemed to know by instinct when the bandage would have stuck to the wound, and she made the last few turns with gentleness. I felt guilty for the sickly sweet smell which now filled the ward.

“Try to do this,” said the doctor as he clenched his hand and slowly opened it again, spreading wide his fingers which were spatulate and stained from smoking.

I made an effort of will and watched my fingers begin slowly to open from my clenched left hand until they would stretch no more, but stayed half-open like trembling claws.

“Once more.”

During the heat of noon we were allowed to take off our pyjama tops, and I could see sweat trickling down my flanks.

“We had to cut quite deep, but you’ll be all right. How’s the head?”

“Better, thank you, sir.”

“Any more nightmares?”

“Not many, sir.”

Even as he spoke, his interest, intense like a ray of light, had been switched away from me. Already he was looking at the Australian in the next bed.

Sister covered the wound.

"I'll come back and do it properly later," she said, and hastened to the next bed.

I tried to concentrate on the seven flies darting round the iron lamp-bracket hanging down from the ceiling. But waves of shame kept surging over me. I felt certain the others in the ward must see all my body blushing.

"I did try to open them. I really did try," I said to myself.

"You could have tried harder," said the voice which caused the blushes. "You know you could. You want to get invalided home."

"No. I don't."

"Very well then. Try again."

I looked round the ward. They were all reading or sleeping. The doctor and sister were looking at Aussie's leg. I stretched out with my right hand for the newspaper and spread it on the bed so that it covered my left arm. I tilted the paper so I could just see underneath it. I tried again. Slowly the fingers opened. My arm ached horribly. I took a long breath and made a last effort. For a moment I looked at the quivering half-open fingers. Then I lay back sweating and trembling.

"What a fool!" I said.

"Who's a fool?" asked Sister.

"The orderly." I was startled because I had spoken aloud. The doctor had gone.

"Which one?"

I did not want to get one of the orderlies blamed.

"Not really a fool," I said stupidly.

"Which one?"

"In fact I'm the fool." I was rallying now.

"I know which one. It's that Palestinian A.T.S.

girl. Nothing but trouble since she's been here."

It was true that the Palestinian At, a dumpy hirsute girl with a yellow squodgy face, was not particularly useful to Sister because she spoke only German, and Sister very definitely spoke only English. When I acted as interpreter I tried to mitigate their rudeness to each other, but the loathing in their tone of voice transcended the language barrier.

"It wasn't the At," I said.

"You're always defending her. I believe you're infatuated."

"Oh, Sister," I said, "you know I've only room for one in my heart."

For a moment the stern creases in her face crumpled. Then she said, "Now attention, all of you. We're moving in four more beds this afternoon. So it's going to be more important than ever to keep everything tidy. And I will not have you lying outside your sheets when the Doctor is on his rounds."

"What do you want us to do? Stand up?" Rupert asked. His leg had just been cut off well above the knee.

"You know exactly what I mean. I don't mind you leaving off your pyjama tops when it's as hot as this. But only the tops. And you must keep yourself under the sheets."

"But we're quite decent like this. And it's sweltering hot under the sheet."

"It isn't that. It's a question of discipline."

"If we lie under the sheet, Sister . . . I say, Sister," Ned began. She turned round to look at him. Even lying in bed he seemed gigantic. Sweat was pouring down his face and neck until it was lost in the thick tangle of hair on his chest.

"If we lie under the sheet, Sister, can we leave off our pyjama bottoms?"

"Major Ashley," Sister said witheringly, "that was not the remark of a gentleman."

"Real gentlemen don't wear pyjamas at all," said Rupert. "I saw one once."

"Sister," Aussie said placatingly. "Why are they moving in four beds, Sister? It's crowded already."

"We've got to find room somewhere. They're evacuating the hospitals at Alexandria."

"That doesn't sound too good," Aussie said slowly.

II

The hospital was composed of long rows of single-storied huts sprawling in the desert between Cairo and Suez. I was still dopy from morphine when the ambulance drove in from the station, but as I was lifted out I caught a vague glimpse of a flat grey plain. And now if I leaned forward in bed I could see a bleak expanse of sand. Perhaps the four new boys would have come straight from the desert. Perhaps, and the thought went thrilling round in my mind, perhaps one of them might even come from my regiment.

After lunch we were supposed to rest until tea. It was impossible to sleep in that fearful heat. I still could not turn on to my side because of my arm, and my head was aching monotonously. A long time later I heard the clattering sound of a tea trolley being wheeled in by the At.

"The tea's weak and tepid," said Rupert.

"And tastes of rubber," said Ned.

" You really must complain to her."

" All right," I said. " Here goes. Look here," I said to the At in my atrocious German, " why is this tea so weak ? "

" Because the Sister is so mean with the tea."

" Why is it cold ? "

" Ah, no, it is hot."

" It is not hot."

The lower bulbous lip began to tremble.

" It is hot when I make it, but I must travel so far to get here." She began to snuffle. " I had hoped you liked the tea."

" Yes. I like it very much indeed. But I would like it even better if it were strong and hot."

" I will make it very good to-morrow. I like you," she said, leering hideously, and turned away.

" I hope you gave her a proper rocket," Rupert said.

" A colossal rocket," I said.

Sister came in and began fussing round the new beds. " Tidy up the ward. Tell her to tidy up the ward."

There was silence as she hurried out again, for all of us knew that the wounded must be arriving. The double doors at the end of the ward were hooked open and we could hear the tread of the stretcher-bearers. My awareness was heightened by pain, and therefore I suppose my memory is vivid. As two orderlies lifted the first man from the stretcher on to the trim bed we saw from his torn cotton shirt and trousers stiff with blood that he came straight from the desert. The other two men were unconscious.

" Hullo," we said to him as Sister and the orderlies moved about with screens and basins.

"Hullo," he said. A shock of tow-coloured hair fell on to his nose, and he wiped it back impatiently.

"Where's the fourth?" Aussie asked.

"The fourth?" His eyes were bright and staring.

"Yes. We were expecting four of you."

"That's very efficient," he said. "Oh, that's very efficient." He laughed a tearing kind of laugh. "He was above me in the blood-wagon, but now he's absent without leave. Perhaps Gabriel will put him on a charge."

"Now this may hurt," Sister said.

"You don't say so," he said. Suddenly he began trembling and twitching horribly. We looked away and began a forced conversation between ourselves. Then he said "Basin," and was violently sick. Presently screens were put round his bed, and we could hear the snip of scissors as the cloth was cut away from his leg wound.

A few hours later, after he had slept a little, the screens were taken away and we saw him again.

"Good evening," we said.

"Good evening." In his issue flannel pyjamas he looked like a schoolboy.

"How's tricks?" said Aussie.

"Better, thanks."

We did not like to ask him questions because he was still in great pain.

"You've come to the right place for a leg wound all right," Aussie said. "They just love arms and legs around here. Best doctors in the world, supposed to be. Young Robin here has got some shrapnel in his head, and they're not a bit interested in that. It's only his arm they care for."

"I expect you want the news?" he said suddenly.

"Well, we do. But not if it tires you," Ned said.

"It was a grand muck up after Knightsbridge," he said. "All the way back. They never broke down commands till too late. Brigadiers were commanding a squadron's strength. And orders had to go through about six links before a handful of tanks could move to the left or right. It was pathetic. And the men were wonderful. But there was nothing to stop Rommel with. And there still is nothing so far as I can see. We've lost bloody nearly everything."

Then one by one, we began to ask him our questions, casually, so as not to show how much it mattered.

"I suppose you didn't hear anything of the Seventh?"

"What about the Fiftieth?"

Sometimes it was a name, because units were mixed by now.

"Did you by any chance run across a chap in the R.B. called Merton?"

"Hear anything of a Captain Head? Captain Roddie Head?"

"Any news of the Fourth Sharpshooters?" I asked later.

"Afraid your Colonel's dead. That's all I heard. They've had a pretty tough time of it. I know that."

The night nurse came in to put out the lights. She was buxom and sweet, and I felt she was my friend. With darkness began the period I dreaded. As the lights were switched out it was as if a generator had been switched on in my mind, which now began to revolve at a quicker speed. Images, phrases, short sequences of horror, came crowding into my head until I was afraid I was going mad. To-night it was the letter. Already I had written and cabled home. That

was all right. But I must write to the relative of the man who had been killed by the plane which wounded me. My mind shied away from the real words. I must write to my servant's wife. I must. Yet each time I began to write, misery and sickness overwhelmed me. The letter was still unwritten. Everything I could think of to say seemed so pitifully inadequate. The conventional phrases seemed indecent. And I could never put down in words the sum of what I felt. Before the nobility and cleanness of death I feel petty and soiled. He died, I thought, yet I'm alive and I'm still as selfish as ever. And I'm afraid to go back. I'm afraid to go back.

III

All round the close leaguer of tanks in full moonlight the desert stretched into the horizon like an endless roll of parchment. Only two sentries were dismounted. I could hear their footsteps padding into the heavy stillness of the night as I sat writing in my tank. Gus had fallen asleep in the wireless operator's seat with his head against my thigh. It impeded writing. I looked at my watch. Only another half-hour. I counted. Another fourteen blocks of the cipher message remained to be done. I must work faster. The pencil twisted in my slippery hand. The sand was heavy with fear. I looked at my watch again. Only another five minutes. But that was impossible. I must have more time than that to hand in my paper. The stillness was suddenly pierced by a shot. In the new silence I heard the whine of a tank engine's electric starter. Then the night was

shattered by the roar of great engines. I felt for the tannoy mike.

“Driver. Start up.”

The tank began to tremble from vibration of its engine. Gus, well awake now, had switched on the wireless, which was bleating in my ears. “Open out. Open out.” Red streaks of tracer light shot across the night as the German Mark III tanks opened fire.

“Two pounders. Traverse right. Traverse right. Steady on. Driver . . .”

Like shiny beetles, tanks crawled across the sand towards us, spitting red comets.

“Fire.”

With a deafening crack the gun recoiled and filled the turret with fumes of cordite.

“Fire.”

The beetles slithered closer. I could see their scaly skin and the long snout groping round for its prey.

In my ears I heard, “Move left. Move left.”

“Driver left.”

The moon was obscured. The night was hideously dark.

“Driver left. Driver left. Driver left.” But our tank did not move.

“He’s been hit,” Gus said. “Jim’s been hit.”

“Two pounder. Twelve o’clock.”

I wriggled down into the darkness of the turret, groped for the opening to the driver’s compartment, and pulled myself through the partition.

“You O.K., Jim? Jim? You O.K.?”

At last I found his head in the darkness. I ran my hand over his face and his body, which was squirming horribly. A sudden light flooded the driver’s compartment. But it was not Jim I was holding. It was a boy

I had once seen in the bed next door. And blood, thick like vomit, was spurting from the stump which had once been his thigh. Now the tank trembled as the shells crashed against it and shook me from side to side. The tank trembled and shook. And I awoke. The night Sister was bending over me.

"It's all right," she was saying quietly. "You're safe in hospital. It's all right."

To my shame I found I was crying.

"Drink this. That's better, isn't it? Is the head aching badly?"

I nodded. I could not speak yet.

"You ought to try to rest more during the day. You've still got two bits of shrapnel in your head. Did they tell you that? They're quite safe where they are, but you'll take some time to get right again. There's no chance of your being allowed back in the desert, do you understand that? So far as I can see you haven't much chance of fighting again in this war. You've had your share of it."

"Have I woken up the others, Sister?"

"Of course not."

I peered round at the bed next to me.

"Where has he gone, Sister? Where has he gone?"

"Shush. You'll wake up the rest."

"Please tell me what's happened to him."

"He got worse in the night. The doctor came, but there was nothing he could do. Now you really must try to sleep. Drink it all down. That's better, isn't it?"

IV

The hot breath of early afternoon lay over the ward like a steaming cloak. I gave up hope of sleep and idly turned my head so that I could see through the open doors into the outside passage. Though from my bed I could only see the bottom half of passers-by in the corridor, I was able by now to identify almost everyone. There was no mistaking the skinny black legs of the Egyptian barber, the wobbling naked pink calves of the Palestinian At, the long, brown, shapely legs of the young Italian orderly, the heavy thighs, bulging beneath gaberdine trousers, of the pompous Colonel in charge of the hospital. At that moment a lanky pair of cherry-picker trousers sauntered into view and disappeared again. I pricked up my ears. Then I heard a well-known voice saying, "Excuse me, Sister, but do you know where I could find Lieutenant Maugham?"

I could scarcely restrain the joyful shout that came to my lips.

"He's resting at the moment. I'm afraid I can't allow you to see him now."

But Peter could be relied upon to rise to the occasion.

"Actually," he said, "I'm his nearest relative."

"You don't look a bit like him," Sister said.

"That always surprises people," he said as they walked into the room. "Robin, my dear old fellow. Where did you get those appalling pyjamas? I'm delighted to see you."

I noticed he was lugging a heavy suitcase.

"Peter, where have you come from?"

"Shepheard's. I wasn't a bit involved in this ghastly

battle because I broke my leg at our mess night. Oh, of course you were there. I forgot."

"What have you got in that case?" asked Sister, with a stare of disapproval at his monocle.

Peter looked at me with sublime innocence. "I thought my brother would like me to bring along his suitcase with a few clothes in it."

"Thanks very much, Peter," I said, never having seen the suitcase before and being in no way related to him.

"I shall turn you out soon after tea," Sister said, and stamped out.

I introduced Peter to Ned and Rupert who were the only two awake.

"You're not really his brother?" Ned asked.

"No. Of course not. But it was a white lie, don't you think?"

"She's only got to look at his card to see you're not his nearest relative."

"So she has," said Peter.

"What's in that case?" I asked after we had exchanged news eagerly.

"Oh, my dear fellow. I nearly forgot." He opened the case and burrowed under layers of old newspapers.

"I couldn't bear to think of you lying in this quite incredibly sordid hole without a drink before lunch," he said, fishing out a bottle of Gordon's gin and Noilly Prat. "It's a little hot for port out here, don't you think? But I always believe whisky helps as a nightcap." And he fished out a bottle of Black Label. "In between times I prefer sherry," he said, producing a bottle of Tio Pepe, "and half the pleasure of liquor is drinking it out of the right glasses." And with the

flourish of a conjurer he displayed a sherry glass, a long tumbler and a cocktail glass.

“ Bless you, Peter.”

“ What about just a teeny weeny drop of sherry now? ”

“ Who’s got a corkscrew? ”

“ There’s one in the case, of course. You don’t suppose I’d forget a corkscrew? ” Peter said in horror as he noiselessly opened the bottle.

After we had all had a sip, Peter put the bottles away and sat down beside me for a gossip.

“ I must make this moment last, ” I said to myself. “ I must catch hold of every precious moment. ” But time slipped away uncontrollably. Tea came and was cleared away. Then our talk became strained, and I knew we were both wondering, with the tides of war flowing against us, whether we should ever meet again.

Sister’s entrance was a relief.

“ I’ve looked at his card, ” she said, “ and you’re nowhere near his nearest relative. ”

“ My secret stands revealed, ” said Peter. “ I was born the wrong side of the blanket. ”

“ I don’t believe a word of it. ”

“ Nor do I, Sister. It was just a wicked plot to wrest my birthright from me. ” He smiled at her so gently that I think she forgave him. “ Look after him, Sister. And when you’ve done with those pyjamas don’t forget to send them to the Victoria and Albert, ” he said, and disappeared.

After Peter’s visit the days passed tediously in heat and pain. At night-time fear became my master so that by dawn I was weak and trembling. Each day the

wireless gave news that Rommel was closer to the Delta. The specious optimism of the previous week's bulletins made us discount any good news now given us and trust only the bad. Gradually alarm began to fill the hospital like a rising fever. We read less and talked more; every shred of news was seized and eagerly discussed; but in our hearts was hopelessness because at this desperate hour we could do nothing.

Ned was allowed up now because the wound in his shoulder was healing well. One evening he wandered over to me and lowered his great hulk into the chair beside my bed. I offered him a drink.

“Are you sure it's safe?”

“If you're nippy about it.”

“Thanks awfully. I'd love one.”

Later he said quietly: “I think I'm going to do a bunk.”

“Where?”

“Back to the regiment. My shoulder's almost healed now. I'm sure I could be some good to them,” he whispered.

I watched the sweat pouring down his homely red face.

“I'm sure I could be some good,” he repeated.

“It's not as hot as usual this evening,” I said.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes. But do you agree it's almost cool?”

“What has that to do with it?”

“Look at your pyjamas, Ned.”

The pyjama trousers were drenched with sweat and clung to his limbs like a wet bathing-dress.

“I always did sweat easily,” he mumbled.

“Not like that you didn't. Do you know what causes that? Nerves. If you go back now you'll crack up.

Heaven knows I would, too. 'That's why I can tell you."

"But I can't stay on here day after day doing sweet muck-all while they're still getting hell. It's just not on. It's just not on."

"Drink?"

"If you can spare it. There must be something we can do. I don't think I can stand this place much longer." He was breathing quickly.

"We probably won't be here much longer. They're moving all the men they can north already."

"Perhaps we'll be sent to Palestine."

"Cave." He whisked his glass out of sight. But it was only the Palestinian At who waddled in looking more primeval than ever with a broom.

"Ask her what Palestine's like."

"Palestine," she said in German, proudly, "is a beautiful country. Not all sand and flies like this. I wish I had never come."

At that moment Sister bustled in.

"I wish I had never come," she repeated, glaring balefully at Sister.

"Now what's she moaning about?" asked Sister.

"She's a bit homesick," I said.

"Not half as sick as she'll be if she doesn't stop mooning about. Let her do a spot of work for a change."

"What does smelly-pig say?" asked the At.

"She's sorry you're homesick," I said.

"Tell her to stop idling and do some work. Work," Sister said to her in exasperation, and made vigorous sweeping movements with her arms.

The At regarded her with great cow eyes. "I don't believe she is sorry I am homesick."

"Oh, yes, she is," I said desperately. "But she thinks work would make you forget."

"But why is the dried-up old cross-patch glaring at me so?"

"That's just her English way," I said.

"Is she going to sweep or is she not?"

"Look here, you must begin sweeping."

"Not if she scowls at me so."

"Work!" Sister shouted in a frenzy of impatience.

"Sweep!" She seized the broom from her and began sweeping vigorously.

"The old hag is dotty," said the At.

"What is she saying?" asked Sister.

My small powers of invention began to fail. "They don't sweep as well as that in Palestine," I said.

"They don't sweep at all, I expect. Judging from her; they're an idle, dirty people. Now," she said, thrusting the broom into the At's podgy hand,

"Sweep!"

The At reluctantly began sweeping, snuffling as she went. Sister watched her for a moment with folded arms. Then she walked briskly out of the ward. As she disappeared the At made an incredibly rude noise, smiled radiantly, and began sweeping happily.

More wounded arrived each day and told their news, so that we all knew the truth. Rommel had advanced to within a day's drive of Alexandria, the fleet had left for Haifa, and the relics of an exhausted Army were now determined to make yet another stand near a bit of desert called El Alamein. Of all the visitors to the ward only the Specialist and Sister, whom we now

liked, remained impassive. But that morning even Sister's eyes seemed brighter.

"We've had orders to evacuate to Palestine all those who can be moved. You will each get your instructions sent you from the office later."

After tea I walked unaided on to the shallow verandah outside for the first time, and sat blinking weakly in the sunshine. I felt sick and wambly; and a few minutes later I teetered in again to find an official slip on my bed.

"What does yours say?" Ned asked.

"I'm to be at the hospital gate at 13.10 hours tomorrow and I'm to report eventually to the Officers' Convalescent Home at Jaffa."

"Muck that for a start. I've got to be at the gate at 11.20 hours, and I'm bound for the Convalescent Home in Sinai."

"We must get that altered right away."

"Which shall we go to?"

"Heads Jaffa, tails Sinai."

"I think Jaffa sounds better. It's near Tel Aviv, and there's sure to be a good bar there. I'll go to the office and get my slip altered."

When he came back an hour later, his face was dark with rage, and at first I could get no sense out of him.

"The bloody sod," he kept saying, "the bloody sod."

Later I gathered the story. After he had waited for nearly an hour outside, Ned was shown into the office.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Don't you stand to attention when addressing a Senior Officer?"

"I thought . . ."

"Never mind what you thought. What have you got to say?"

"My slip's made ouf for Sinai."

"Yes. Well?"

"A friend of mine in the same ward is going to Jaffa. So I'd like to go to Jaffa too."

"Do you seriously imagine we can consult your fads and fancies?"

"I thought it was just a question of altering the slip."

"There's a war on, my good man. And you'd do well to remember it."

"The fat sod," Ned said to me that night. "I bet he's never heard a shot fired in anger."

"Never mind," I said, "judging from the latest news he soon will."

Ned was still seething with rage when he came to say good-bye the next morning.

"I shall loathe Sinai. I know I shall."

"When you get there you may be able to escape to Jaffa."

A few months ago we had been strangers. For a few weeks in that ward we had shared laughter and pain. Now, at this moment of parting, the intimacy was already broken; we were strangers and we could think of nothing easy to say.

"I'll try. Well, I'm glad we met. See you soon."

"Best of luck to you."

"All the best. Cheerio."

I was staring after him and wondering whether we would ever meet again when the At waddled in and sidled up to me mysteriously.

"I have got something for you," she whispered.

"What is it?" I asked, rather irritably. My head

was aching, and the ward throbbed with great waves of heat.

From behind her back she produced a flat parcel tied up with a piece of faded ribbon.

“Look!”

Wrapped in layers of tissue paper was a soggy cardboard box.

“Open it.”

I pulled off the crumpled lid. The box was full of home-made chocolates. Some were wrapped in a zinc-coloured paper; others lay greasy and naked, oozing on to the mottled cardboard.

“It’s a present,” she said. “My mother sent them from Palestine.”

“But you mustn’t give me this.”

“Why not?”

“You must keep them for yourself.”

“Oh, no. I have given it you for a present because you are leaving.”

“I really . . .”

“Please keep them. It was my mother who made them herself. I know she would have liked you to keep them.”

As I looked up at her pasty, flabby face shining with sweat and kindness, suddenly I felt mean and ashamed.

“Thank you very much indeed. You are wonderfully good.”

“Your name is Robin, isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Mine is Miriam. I am a Jew. Did you guess that?”

“Yes, I did.”

Looking at the chocolates, I thought of the woman

who made them. As she moulded them into pretty shapes, perhaps it made her feel closer to think of her daughter, far away in a foreign land, eating them. Miriam to her was something beloved, something beautiful. Not a squodgy nuisance.

“Good-bye. Good luck.”

“Thank you very much. *Auf wiedersehen.*”

A 15-cwt. truck arrived to collect the kit of officers leaving by the afternoon train, so we piled on our suit-cases and then began the long walk to the gates. No transport was provided for the other ranks, and scores of wounded men, struggling under the weight of their kit-bags, toiled painfully along the sandy track towards the gates in the scorching heat of noon. Some who had left their beds that morning for the first time in a month were already exhausted. The sun beat down fiercely. The stronger men tried to help their friends, and the officers joined in, but there was little we could do for those who had already fainted beside their load. One man lay across his kit-bag sobbing bitterly. A pallid officer, whom I had never seen before, stepped up to him, pulled him gently to his feet, where he stood swaying dizzily, took one end of the kit-bag and beckoned me to take the other. Thus we made our way to the gates, with the man stumbling behind us trying to gulp down his rending sobs. None of us spoke, and when we reached the gates we parted in silence.

The journey remains a confused blur of dust and pain and intense weariness. There were no sleepers, so we sat upright all night, squashed closely together in the fetid heat. My head ached terribly, and lunatic phrases churned round in my mind in rhythm to the

rumble of the wheels as the train clattered forward across the vastness of the Sinai desert.

During the last year we had grown used to the tawny stretches of the Western Desert, to the Wâdis dappled with blue-grey camel grass, to the contrast of stone and sand. That morning in Palestine we looked out on a different world. A bright red earth sparkled under a deep blue sky, and the orange groves danced in the sunshine.

V

The Convalescent Home in Jaffa was in a pleasant private house. Good food, a Bechstein piano, and a large library made it possible to forget the war and the Army. The other officers looked friendly; but I kept to myself. I wallowed in the luxury of solitude for the first time since I had joined the Army as a trooper shortly before the outbreak of war. In company at meal-times I was nervous and depressed. When I tried to draw on some reserve of energy to be cheerful with the rest of them, it was as if a walking-stick on which I was used to lean had been taken away. During the next few weeks I experienced so often this feeling which I associated with the removal of a support that, when in company I found myself of a sudden exhausted, I would put out my hand as if to lean on a stick.

One morning I decided I could walk down alone to the Services club on the seashore. I went to the library to find a book to take with me. Idly I looked at the titles until I saw *Orientations*, by Sir Ronald Storrs. During the long voyage round the Cape I had read

Seven Pillars of Wisdom for the second time, and I remembered Lawrence's description of Storrs. I opened the book at random and began to read, casually at first, then with rising excitement. Presently I put the book carefully under my arm and stepped out into the sunshine, savouring the prospect of a long treat ahead. I had been thrilled by the *Seven Pillars*. But the peoples and events seemed of another world, heroic and refined, which had few points of contact with the bit of Levant we had known. Lawrence seemed too god-like, too remote from those few things of the East an ordinary soldier could see, too unattainable. But the Levant that Storrs described lay all around me in the dusty streets. That hungry-looking student with his books, that swollen sheikh on his tiny donkey, that brown child rubbing his nakedness in the dirt—all were of the same world as this book. How often a book picked up by chance may reveal a new interest!

This morning, and every morning afterwards in Jaffa, I sat at a little iron table on the club's sandy terrace reading my book, except now and then when I would look up with contentment at the lovely bodies splashing in the waves. Other orientalists seemed to write of the East either with grave solemnity, as if in church, or with the severe ponderousness and timid discretion of a bureaucrat preparing an official report. Storrs wrote as if he were sitting with a group of friends over port at the Travellers' Club.

As the warm days slipped by, gradually the resolve was set in my mind that if I could not return to the regiment I would try for some job in the Levant.

Soon I was strong enough to explore the steep,

an ardent Arab nationalist, whom I met in a coffee-house in Jaffa.

"They would be an impressive argument for Zionism," he said, "if Palestine belonged to the Jews. But it doesn't. It belongs to us, the Arabs. When you go to Jerusalem, I will give you a letter of introduction to Dr. Ahmed Khalidi, the Head of the Arab College. He will convince you."

One man's ailment is another man's boredom, so I would like to suppress talk of malady. But, unfortunately, it is impossible to separate my illness completely from the story I want to tell, because it is part of the plot. For instance, if I had not been wounded I might never have gone to Syria, and so on. However, I will cut as much as I can.

I was restless because there might be little time to see all that I wanted. I was impatient with the weakness of my body, and goaded it on with the excitement of new people and places because I could not relax. So I lived taut, always on the edge of fatigue. Perhaps for this reason my memory of those days is blurred and uneven. When, during my second journey, I stayed in Jerusalem again, I was surprised how little I could remember of my first visit. I seem only to have taken brief notes of my visit to Dr. Khalidi. As I look at the hectic writing on the stained pages torn from my Army notebook, I remember that I hired a taxi to drive up to the Arab College, and, thinking that the Principal might only be able to spare me a few minutes, I asked the driver to wait. But Dr. Khalidi, when he saw I was interested in the Zionist problem and eager to hear his views, generously rehearsed the whole Arab case for

my benefit, while I sat entranced by his personality, unwilling to interrupt the flow of his thought, yet thinking now and then of the taxi outside.

I left with ideas and phrases surging round my head. And I recklessly drove out of my way to the Stationery Office and purchased copies of the Palestine Commission Reports, which I read late into the night.

VI

As I sat in the smelly carriage, I felt that my impressions of the last few weeks were so fleeting that I might just as well have been to a travel film about Palestine. The film in my mind was radiant with the colours of the sky and the sea and the sienna of the earth contrasting with the delicate grey-green of the olive groves sedately climbing up the mountainside. "And now," the announcer was saying, "we leave the pleasant land of Palestine and cross the Sinai desert to return to the mysterious land of Egypt." Mysterious, my foot. There was little mysterious about the bits of Egypt the British soldier frequented. The beer he drank and the films he saw were American, the shows, stocked with superannuated chorus girls, were British and ENSA to the core, the brothels he visited were inspected and controlled by the Army and "like a bloody clinic." Everything seemed to conspire to insulate him from the mysterious East until at last he gave up trying and lived as nearly as he could as he lived in England. He was divided by a barrier of

language and environment from Eastern things and peoples. Only the false, the unrepresentative, the outcast touched him: the bogus amber necklace, the dragoman, the fake antique; and presently he wondered which was true and which false. Which was the reality: the sheikh in his flowing white robes by his black tent in the desert, or the Pasha's son in his natty gent's suiting by his Cadillac outside the Continental Hotel? Perhaps both were the real thing. I determined I would try to find out.

I returned with renewed vigour to the book I was reading about the Middle East. I had bought *Forty Years in Basra* in Jerusalem. I had paid for it, and I must make myself read it—in spite of the heat—every word of it, including the footnotes which the author felt compelled to add in case the readers should be unaware of the distinction of his friends.

"My first night in Baghdad," I read, "it was ever so pleasant to dine again with Squiffy* and to find that his A.D.C. was none other than Batty.† The next morning I breakfasted at the Embassy with Potts,‡ and lunched at a deliciously gay little Greek restaurant on the Tigris with 'Pokes' Pettigrew,§ Friggle Brown|| and Blotto Blackburn.¶

"Pixie** came in later with Celia,†† Geyser,‡‡ Harry Agah,§§ Kno||| and . . ."

* General Sir Montague Rumpwell, D.S.O., O.B.E.

† Lord Evansent of Corse.

‡ H.E. Sir Ogilvy Scruthorne, K.C.M.G.

§ The Hon. P. K. S. Pettigrew.

|| U. S. Brown, the writer.

¶ Air Marshal Sir Blarney Blackburn, C.B., M.B.E.

** Viscount Loaters.

†† Lady Celia Kaylor.

†† The Earl of Ascot.

§§ The Duke of Agah.

||| H.R.H. The Prince of Knogarse.

I have discovered other writers of travel books who are a bit odd in their use of names. There is the writer-who-is-determined-to-make-no-bones-about-it and who tries not to sound as if the name mattered more than another. Thus:

"I dined at the Embassy with Sir Hubert Artifice and Wystan Dumbold the Oriental Secretary. . . ." At this point you feel he (or she) pauses. What about the Severns? They were there that evening. Perhaps they might be offended, especially after their invitation to tea. "And Claude and Auriole Severn. . . ." But if I'm putting in Dumbold and the Severns oughtn't I to put in that hateful Second Secretary. After all, he was there. Yes, but he won't mind. He's only a junior diplomat. All the same, it might be a bit snobbish to put in Dumbold *and* the Severns and not the Second Secretary. . . . "And, of course, St. John Éclaire." And so on.

Gradually such writers grow hardened to this realist technique, and we get passages which read like this:

"Lunch was bright at Government House, with Lord Pheelthrowen beaming at the head of the table, which included Admiral Slouche, Rosita Brunt, Captain Tourki de Lyte, Brigadier Jones, Muriel Titchcock and, of course, St. John Éclaire."

One result of this technique is that if one really looks up the Second Secretary in the appendix one finds:

Éclaire, St. John—at dinner with Sir Hubert Artifice, p. 68; at lunch with Lord Pheelthrowen, p. 92; at breakfast with Sir Montague Rumpwell, p. 104.

As if the poor man did nothing but feed.

I closed *Forty Years in Basra* and listened to the

clatter of the wheels of the train. I decided that dealing with the names of real people is a tricky business. The writer of fiction has an advantage over the man who wants to tell a true story because he can concentrate on a few characters so that the reader comes to know them. He can chuck them to Tibet when they are inconvenient and restore them by plane in a sentence if necessary; he can suppress minor characters at will. The reporter of travels is not so fortunate. He meets strangers along the road each day; and perhaps he makes a new friend and walks with him a while, but they part at the cross-roads, and round the corner there is a stranger he will meet who, in turn, will soon take a different path. Thus the reporter is in a difficulty. If he includes all the meetings on his way, he may confuse the reader; if he excludes chance acquaintances, he cuts out an important element in the stuff of travel. His solution, I suppose, is a selection—a selection based not on the importance of the names as names, but on their importance to the writer. If the art of fiction is to make invented characters seem real, the art of *reportage* is to make real people as vivid as characters in fiction. Just as the fiction-writer may make a composite character by selecting a trait from Brown, a habit from Jones and an experience from Robinson, so, surely, the reporter is none the less truthful if he merges three chance acquaintances into one?

Limping or tottering about Cairo I found many relics of the Knightsbridge tank battle. Though some of us had already been given new jobs, tanks were still our obsession, and as we eagerly compared experiences we discovered that our stories linked up to form one

coherent report. We decided to meet one evening to write a few notes on the causes of the muck-up. For three years in the Army I had worked and fought in tanks. Even to-day they crawl across my dreams. So I am not surprised when I remember how, for a while in Cairo, the thought of tanks overlaid my rising interest in the Arab lands. Tanks date quickly, and there is something quaintly in period—almost Victorian—about the notes we made then. But one thing, to our mind, time will not mitigate. We will never forget the smug incompetence of the officials who sent us out to fight in tanks which were so greatly inferior to the Germans'. Nor will we forget the inefficiency of the men they sent to lead us. Whitewash is unratiomed in Whitehall, and the official historian will drip with eulogies and platitudes. But we know.

I reported to the Medical Officer and to G.H.Q. A week later I was recommended for a job in the Middle East Intelligence Centre. I was told I was to begin work in Damascus when I felt fit. So I left the heat of Cairo and joyfully travelled to Syria.

VII

Rising abruptly from the blue-green sea, the hill of Beirut is terraced with thick rows of houses in the French style, linked by steep streets along which the trams jangle perilously, and the students wander indifferent to the traffic and the din.

The nights were cool after the fierceness of the summer's heat, and I sauntered down the steep road entranced by the wafts of jasmine in the gentle air. I

listened to the snatches of French voices from below which aroused in me a nostalgia for things loved in France. In those days a French voice laughing in happiness was a symbol, a reminder that the beauty of France was not destroyed, only withered so that the waters of freedom would restore her loveliness. Or so I thought strolling down the hill that evening. But I was perplexed by the lack of friendship I found between the British and French in Beirut. The barrier of language was not the reason, for most of the officers in Spears' Mission spoke French quite fluently, yet it was unusual to see a French and a British officer dining together. The French I met at bars and cafés seemed somehow different from the French I used to meet in Paris or Grenobles or Marseilles. Perhaps it was imagination, but I felt they were suspicious of something. I asked:

“They’re suspicious because you’re English.”

“But why should they be?”

“When you’ve been here a while you’ll find out.”

My friend changed the conversation abruptly.

That evening I met a tipsy French lieutenant in a bar down by the harbour.

“You’re in the Spears’ Mission.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Then why do you speak French?”

“Because I had a French nanny so that when I was seven I spoke more French than English. Have a drink?”

“All right.”

“Do you know many English here?”

“Not one.”

“Why not?”

“The English are our enemies,” he said.

"What absolute nonsense! Do you think General Spears is your enemy?"

"He is our worst enemy. Spears is a baby-killer. He created the Free French Movement and now he wants to destroy it. You have only just come over here. You wait. You will see. The English work against us with the Arabs. They want to take our place."

He swayed and steadied himself against the bar.

"Chaque Anglais se croit un petit Lawrence," he said, and stumbled to the door.

When I repeated this conversation to General Spears one evening on the terrace in the mountainside at Aley, he shrugged his shoulders.

"The French out here are corrupt," he said. "If we give in to them it will mean chaos in Syria. If we don't give in to them they hate us."

I eagerly treasured every scrap of conversation during those days at Aley. But though I had moved to the hotel in order to rest, I still had violent headaches.

"Perhaps it's the height which gives you headaches," someone suggested. "Why not move to Lattakia? It's wonderfully quiet there by the sea, and you can stay with E.P."

"Who is E.P.?"

"E.P. is the Political Officer at Lattakia. Captain Evans-Pritchard. Terrific chap. Led a band of Abyssinian irregulars against the Italians. Anthropologist fellow. Lived a year alone with the Nuer Tribe in Africa, the chaps who speak by clicking noises in their throats. You'll like him. Meet me at noon to-morrow in the Spears' Mission, and you can drive back with him to Lattakia."

Although Pritchard sounded grim I accepted because I wanted to travel as much as I could before beginning work in Damascus.

I met him the next day.

I had expected a red-faced officer on his dignity, whom I would have to call "sir." I found a man of about thirty with a strong Roman nose, bright twinkling eyes and a thick mop of black hair which fell in festoons about his neck. He wore an old bush shirt with baggy cotton trousers. His buttons were covered with verdigris, and he looked incredibly scruffy.

"Shall we start right away for Lattakia? It's a four-hour drive. Or shall we have a drink first?" he said.

"Let's have a drink first."

We drove off to a bar.

"Do you mind if Harry my driver joins us? Oh, no, of course you're a fighting soldier. It's only the base barnacles who object."

VIII

E.P. installed me in an empty flat over the tobacco factory beside the sea. At night when the heavy sweet smell of tobacco drying in the warehouse mingled with the scent of wild jasmine sprawling along the walls, he would visit me, bringing perhaps an Arab friend or Edward Henderson, his young Assistant, and we would sit on the wide verandah, drinking under the stars while the waves washed over the strand and lapped against the rocks. Sometimes the night was so magical in its fragrance and moonlight and stillness that the Arab and

English voices were hushed while we gazed in silence at the white roofs and domes and the sea glittering in the moonlight. Or we would discuss life and death and love until the sky grew light and crimson with the miracle of dawn.

As the sun rose behind the great Mosque only a slight measure of reality seemed to return to the little world of Lattakia. The cocks crowed vigorously, dogs barked, and the vagrants turned and scratched, stretched their limbs, and resumed their endless gossip about Suliman Murshid, chief subject of discussion in the fussy *salons* of the French General's Residence, in the market-place, in the local brothel, in the *Serail*, and in my flat; for *l'affaire Murshid* had split the little town into two camps—those who were for Murshid and those who were against Murshid. Leader of the former party was the French Governor, General Montclar, be-medalled, gallant veteran of a dozen wars; leader of the latter was his opposite number, Captain Evans-Pritchard, anthropologist and professor. Montclar spoke no Arabic and no English. E.P. spoke fluent Arabic but little French. Moreover, by temperament they were not ideally matched. Montclar was very much a soldier, fiery and fiercely serious with a strict, dominating personality. E.P. was a civilian and a don at that; he was clever, gentle, gay, unconventional and beloved of the Arabs. However, they were alike in their peculiar tenacity.

The early history of Murshid—bone of contention eventually between Whitehall and the Quai d'Orsay—is shrouded in the falsehoods of his friends and of his enemies. But so far as we could gather the story was this:

There were two sheikhs, Rahim and Ali, who were

B*

guardians of an Alouite shrine. They were living poorly, for the offerings to the shrine were becoming very scanty, when one day they came upon a young shepherd boy of fifteen years old, lying on the hillside by their shrine in a trance. The two priests saw their opportunity. They took the lad and put him in the shrine. "This man," they said, "is full of the stuff of god-head." Their idea was that, while the lad lived he would attract the curious, and after his death his tomb could be made into a famous shrine to attract large numbers of worshippers. For a time they prospered. The Alouites flocked to the shrine to see God, who was really the peasant lad, Suliman Murshid. But the novelty soon grew stale, and to their dismay the boy did not die. On the contrary, he got better.

It was at this stage, I think, that Mohammed Khatabil, the village blacksmith, came on to the scene. He approached the sheikhs and told them they were not running their show properly. As a result of devices which he showed them, he persuaded them to take him into partnership. The first thing he did was to paint Murshid's face with phosphorus so that it gleamed in the darkness. This had a great success. The peasants flocked by night to see God's shining face. Another day he stripped the boy naked and lay in the sun beside him in a private place, with his right hand on Murshid's breast. By sundown the lad's body was burned bright red except for one place on his heart where, outspread, gleamed the rather outsize imprint of the Hand of God. On a later occasion Khatabil purchased a wireless set which he placed behind the screen by Murshid's bed. When the peasants arrived that evening to see the gleaming Murshid muttering in his delirium, Khatabil pressed a remote switch and the Voice of God rang out

through the hut saying, in the modulated accent of Oxford, "Hullo. Hullo. zLO calling."

By now the people were convinced that God had arrived, and so there could be no more famine. They took no notice of their crops. Disorder spread throughout the land. In May 1923, Suliman Murshid was arrested by the local French Political Officer. Unfortunately his arrest coincided with the failure of the crops cultivated by the unbelievers. The Alouites were convinced that the famine that year was the result of God having been put in clink. The French became more unpopular than ever, for they were the gaolers of the Almighty. Realizing at last that something had to be done, they appointed a new political officer with a new theory.

The Alouites, he explained, were really the descendants of the Christian Arabs, the Ghassaniye, who were used as a buffer between the Roman Empire and the desert. These Christian Arabs had not disappeared from the face of the earth, but had migrated to the Alouite country. However, when they came to live amongst Moslems, it became necessary for them to conceal their faith. The Alouite religion in its form today was the result of this concealed faith which perforce must be outwardly Moslem, but which remained inwardly Christian. Therefore, the worshippers of Murshid were, in fact, inwardly Christian. Accordingly, the new French political officer argued, to whom would the Alouites look for support and protection? What nation was the traditional protector of the Christians in the Levant? They did not need three guesses. They could reply but with one word. France.

As the great protectors of the Alouites, the French proceeded to restore Suliman Murshid. The next link

in the story is a guess. A few months ago I gathered from the Head of Police that, at the time of his arrest, Murshid was—to use the policeman's phrase—definitely dopey. And so it seems possible that he had come to believe in his divinity. Yet when he was released from prison, the delusions were gone. I surmise that the most likely explanation of this change is that Khatabil visited him while he was in prison and brutally tore away the shreds of his delusion, and in the same breath, while the man was still staggering from the shock of the brutal truth that he was an ordinary peasant of no consequence at all, Khatabil showed Murshid the power he could obtain by maintaining his divine role. This is a guess. But we know that in 1927, when Suliman Murshid was reinstated, he immediately entered into partnership with his managers. Later the sheikhs disappeared, conveniently enough, from the scene, as Murshid began his career as God . . .

Thus Montclar supported Murshid because it was French policy to do so, while E.P. opposed Murshid because he was a bad man and because he was convinced that if the Germans invaded through Turkey, Murshid would turn against the Allies.

The differences between the two men were not reduced by conversation. E.P. spoke in Arabic, which was translated by the interpreter into French: Montclar spoke in French, which had to be translated into Arabic. According to Edward, it became a point of honour with each not to understand one word of the other's language; and the conversation went thus:

E.P.: "Good morning, General."

Montclar: "What's he say?"

Interpreter: "He says, 'Good morning, General.'"

Montclar: "Good morning."

E.P.: "What's he say?"

And so on . . .

The fantasy hovering over Lattakia refreshed me after the grim reality of wounds and death.

IX

The *Souk* and the side-streets of Lattakia are so redolent of the East that they remind me of a Hollywood film-set. There sits the beggar drooling quietly to himself, while the flies swarm over his face. To the left are five actors, overdressed for the part, rather obviously doing nothing and contemplating the eternal mysteries. Now three donkeys, grotesquely overladen, are driven down the street by a strident boy. On my right some ragged Arabs are haggling with exaggerated gestures over the price of a pair of shoes in front of a dirty shop, which is really only a façade, and six tousled children are playing in the slimy gutter. (Will the Hayes Office sanction their nakedness? What about that very young girl feeding a wizened baby at her breasts?) Three sheikhs in flowing raiment are smoking hubble-bubbles as they loll in the outdoor café, while an unceasing stream of supers, dressed in fantastic clothes, wander up and down the narrow street.

I see it all from without, sitting snug in the stalls of my European thought and upbringing. How can I see it from within? That is the question. Will I ever

know, or knowing understand, what these people are thinking?

A student comes to teach me Arabic each morning. But after an hour or so of grammar we both get bored and abandon the lesson to gossip happily in French. My concept of the young Arab as a wild, feckless creature in white fluttering robes, prancing about on a stallion, is being rudely shattered by experience. Ahmed is careful and serious, and he is neatly dressed in a tight check suit with a purple stripe. He has never ridden a horse, but sometimes he cautiously bathes for a few minutes in the sea. Otherwise he takes no exercise. His views are more coloured by North America than by Arabia; for while he has frequently seen the night life of Chicago and Manhattan in the local cinema, he has never seen the desert. He is alert, clever and altogether charming; he is distracted and unsettled. The gradual influence of Western clothes, cinemas and magazines on the coast dwellers of the Levant has produced a veneer of the cheapest elements of Western civilization, which sometimes overlays completely the enduring and profound spirit of Islam which remains beneath. I have seen the result of transporting the outward trappings of Western culture to the Indians in Mexico. Here it is the same old story. The product is tawdry. Only the hill men escape. . . .

X

“This evening,” said E.P., “the Sharifian brothers will be calling on us.”

“They sound like a music-hall team.”

"They can claim direct descent from the prophet Mohammed, so they have the right to the title 'Sharif.' They all speak French and you'll like them."

The three Sharifs arrived a few minutes after six, and marched on to the verandah, where E.P. introduced them to me while I tried to distinguish one dusky young face from another. All three looked about twenty-five. All three were lithe, swarthy and handsome, and wore tight brown suits of imitation tweed. But I was growing used to the padded shoulders, pointed shoes and flashy ties, and I looked more at their eyes and at their hands which were lean and sensitive. I find that hands reveal a man more than his face. The facial muscles are forced (perhaps even unconsciously) to a certain expression when anyone is present. The face moves to disguise the greed, the venom or the lust. A man's face is the camouflage of his character. As he grows older the design may wear thin, the covering may crease, the mortar may flake, the shape of the roof in places may reveal the nature of the work within. But the whole design is never stripped away except in solitude and sleep. The lines of a face may be altered for an instant or changed permanently by the plastic surgeon; the lines and shape of a hand cannot be changed by taking thought. A man's hand is the eloquent witness to his nature.

Their hands, I thought, were fluent, virile and delicate. They moved decisively with nervous strength. There was no doubt, no self-questioning. As I watched them on the verandah sedately sipping the arak forbidden in their strict Moslem home, it seemed as if this evening were a dream I had dreamed before. Even their names—Zen, Fadel, Mehdi—were familiar. And I knew their voices so well that for a moment I won-

dered whether we had met before. Thus I knew in some way that E.P. would rise as the clock struck nine and suggest we all walk across to the Casino Hotel for dinner. And I knew it would be the youngest brother, Mehdi, who would stay behind while I locked up, and, as we crossed the courtyard in the moonlight, would take my arm saying, "You and I will be friends."

We were merry at dinner, though I noticed the brothers took no drink.

"We can't in public," said Mehdi, who had seen my glance.

I thought for a moment. Arak is a colourless fluid like absinthe which turns a cloudy white when water is added to it. I asked the waiter to fill a teapot with arak and bring three cups. They were delighted by this solution to the problem, and sat primly swilling down arak and winking at us now and then with large brown eyes.

As we sat drinking coffee outside on the terrace, which overlooked the sea shining in the moonlight, we were joined by an aggressive sheikh who we knew was one of Murshid's cronies. He began boasting tediously of his skill with a pistol. Four empty beer bottles had been left on the balcony at the sea's edge. Suddenly E.P. took out his revolver and, without altering his position as he lolled in the deck-chair, shattered a bottle with each shot.

"What a rowdy evening it is!" he said as he put his pistol away.

By now the brothers were distinct in my mind. Zen, the eldest, who spoke seldom, had firm, clear eyes and a wide, generous mouth. He was the most straightforward and perhaps the strongest. Fadel was of slighter build. He was quick to laugh in his soft voice;

he talked easily and his gestures were fluent and gentle. Mehdi, the youngest, aged twenty, looked like a bedu boy with his wild eyes and shock of black hair. His square shoulders jutted in to a lean waist, and his body seemed always taut and alert like a nervous pony.

Though after that evening we met every day that I was in Lattakia, I can only remember stray irrelevant scraps of our talk. For the stuff of friendship is not made from an exchange of opinions or from discussions on the infinite, but from far simpler things—companionship and laughter and the animal force which attracts us to some and, without logic, repels us from others. Thus, if I were to insert a curious debate on Mohammed, it would mostly be an invention, and the plain truth is that I spent two weeks with the young Sharifs without being able to remember a single conversation and without being able to explain precisely the experience I gained and treasure.

XI

“ Major Altounyan’s arriving this evening to stay in the flat,” said E.P., in his role of impresario and magician.

“ Who’s he? ”

“ A poet. Lawrence, in one of his last letters, wrote, ‘ An Armenian called Altounyan is one of three I most care for.’ Actually, he’s half Armenian and half Irish. After Lawrence’s death he wrote a poem about him called *The Ornament of Honour*. He got an M.C. in the last war, and knows this part of the world backwards. You’ll like him.”

Altounyan did not arrive that night. The next morning, however, the door burst open and a stocky figure appeared, carrying two packs, a haversack and three woolly greatcoats, which he threw on the floor, muttered a bit, disappeared for a moment, lugged in a bed-roll and then examined me.

"Hullo, laddie. Who are you? Oh, yes, I've heard about you. Can I stay here?"

"Which room would you like?"

"That's all right," he said vaguely.

"Can I get you a drink?"

"No thanks." He was obviously distracted.

"Some tea?"

"No thanks. Ah, there it is," he said triumphantly, fishing out a pipe from his bulky pocket. "Now let's sit down somewhere and talk. Where have you been and what have you been doing? Begin from scratch."

While I told him I noticed the deep intentness with which he listened. He seemed to concentrate on what one was saying with every particle of his being. When I stopped talking he was silent for quite a time.

"You knew George Antonius?"

"Slightly."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"On Easter Sunday." He was immobile and intent again. Somehow his receptivity encouraged one to speak.

"At a lunch party in Cairo."

"I know. Old Generals, ambitious politicians, beautiful scented women and dashing young Guardsmen."

"He arrived very late and refused the first two courses. Our hostess said, 'But George, you must eat something on Easter Sunday,' and he answered, 'But my inside is also risen.' Later I got a chance to talk

to him, and he told me he thought our Ambassador's visit to King Farouk, with tanks which knocked down the palace gates, was a grievous mistake. He said that Farouk was young and proud. There were two ways to treat him. As a King to be respected, or as an enemy to be browbeaten. He said a lot more, but that's all I can remember."

"How long have you had that stammer?"

"Since I was hit."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"And you're due to report to Colonel Elphinston at G.S.I.(t.) next week?"

"Yes."

"You're not strong enough to begin work yet. You'd better come and stay with me at Aleppo. I'll fix it with Elphinston."

He must have seen my look of disbelief, for he said, "Firstly Colonel Elphinston's a friend of mine, and secondly, I happen to be a doctor. See, laddie?" He chuckled to himself. "Put that in your pipe and smoke it. I'll expect you in Aleppo in three days' time," he said, and stamped away to see Evans-Pritchard.

XII

Harry stopped the car in front of the ancient battered door of a tall house overlooking the Moslem cemetery.

"Ring the bell, sir," he said, "and the servant will lower the key on a piece of string from the third floor. It saves him walking down."

I pulled vigorously at the bell-handle, and presently

a six-inch key was lowered from a window above; I admitted myself into the house and discovered from the servant that there were no Altounyans in it. Mrs. Altounyan was working in Jerusalem, their youngest daughter, who was in Aleppo, was out at school, and it was thought that Major Altounyan had flown to Cairo. However, Colonel Stirling who I knew shared the house with them, wished to see me. I knew of his fame not only from *Seven Pillars*, but from other officers I had met. I took a deep breath and opened the door.

A short, thick-set, powerful-looking man, wearing the red tabs of a full Colonel and five rows of medals, stood up as I walked in.

"Hullo, are you Maugham? Ernest Altounyan isn't here, but you mustn't mind that. I expect he'll be back in a day or two. Just make yourself comfortable in the meantime. Sit down and have a drink and tell me what you've been up to."

He mixed me a gin and French, sat down, crossed his legs and looked at me inquiringly through his spectacles while I haltingly told my tale.

At first he was reticent. Later he began to talk, and I listened entranced as he poured out wealth from the store of his experience. He spoke of Palestine where he was once a Governor, of London where he once worked as a shop-walker, of the tribes and Lawrence, whom he loved. One of his stories has stayed in my mind.

After the war, Lawrence, wearing a shabby army mackintosh, was walking down Bond Street when a pompous Major escorting a smart girl stopped him and said:

"Don't you usually salute an officer of Field rank?" To which Lawrence replied simply, "No."

"What's your regiment?"

"Haven't got one. S-s-sorry."

"Will you stand to attention when I'm talking to you."

"N-no. I haven't got time. I'm in rather a hurry. B-b-but perhaps when we part," he said, drawing back his mackintosh to reveal the chevrons of a full colonel, "perhaps *you'll* salute *me*."

"The stammer, of course, was put on," said Stirling. "He could be a little devil when he wanted to."

This story illustrates the prejudices which Lawrence aroused.

Altounyan's daughter, Bridget, took me to see the Aleppo market which is enclosed and partly underground. We wandered along dark, narrow, vaulted streets and peered into the little shops hollowed out of tiny caves in the rock. One street is all shoe shops with fantastic bunches of red shoes dangling precariously from strings outside like toys on a Christmas tree. Another street is all rope shops. One street, of fruit and vegetables, is so narrow we must step aside to let a donkey or mule pass by. Dark, thin people flutter along the covered alleyways, their brown eyes glitter with desire, and their left hands clutch, like claws, at the folds of their robes. The *burnous* is an inefficient garment, for it is buttonless and must be held in position by the hand. The close air reveals the trade of each quarter to the blind man staggering forward painfully with his scarred, white eyes raised to the ceiling. He smells the sickly raw smell of uncured leather, the pungence of the street of spices, the charcoal in the sombre high vaulted courtyard where the silversmiths work, their dark, Armenian faces intent upon the cun-

ning of intricate filigree. Narrow enclosed streets twine and criss-cross so that one could easily get lost in the dark labyrinths.

We stopped to take coffee in one shop and to buy Christmas presents—handbags of gazelle skin, gay bracelets and lengths of gold- or silver-embroidered brocade. Then we left the *Souk*, and stepped out blinking into the September sunshine.

XIII

I notice it is sometimes at this stage in travel books that the author shyly mentions in passing that "It was about this period" he got spliced, hooked, enchained, wed, espoused, entered into matrimony, chose a partner, joined hands, shared his life with another, lost his bachelorhood or even married. Therefore I think I should tell at this stage the truth about Miss Martineau.

I cannot remember when I first came across Harriet Martineau. I may have caught a glimpse of her in Cairo, and I am almost certain I saw her one day looking shamefully neglected in a Beirut library. I finally picked her up quite easily the day I found her, dusty and dishevelled, lying flat on the counter of a dingy shop in Aleppo. I bargained with the evil-looking Arab who owned the shop until we settled for two Syrian pounds, which was not expensive considering the pleasure she has given me since then.

Harriet Martineau was an authoress. She says: "In the autumn I left home for a few weeks to visit some of

my family. At Liverpool I was invited by friends to accompany them in their proposed travels in the East."

Her book, *Eastern Life, Present and Past*, is the result of that journey. I was fortunate in my companion, for her work is still topical. The journey was made in 1846, and the book was published in 1848. Miss Martineau died in 1876 at the age of seventy-four.

Temples, crocodiles, tombs, camels, chieftains, antiquities and dragomen—the usual apparatus of Eastern travel—lie scattered through the six hundred pages of her book. But the writer was shrewd, alert and observant, and she was an intrepid journalist. This Early Victorian lady carried her trumpet (for she suffered from deafness) through hurricanes and sandstorms, across deserts dangerous with savage tribes, in sickness and starvation. She was an indomitable tourist and impatient of anything namby-pamby, as her directions for travellers in the appendix to the book show :

" The traveller should not be alarmed if he finds he sleeps little during such a journey. If he is kept awake by vermin or by fever, of course, that is a great evil: but an easy, quiet sleeplessness will do him less harm than he might suppose. . . . As to the very disagreeable subject of the vermin which abound peculiarly in Egypt—lice—it is right to say a few words. After every effort to the contrary, I am compelled to believe that they are not always—nor usually—caught from the people about one: but that they appear of their own accord in one's clothes, if worn an hour too long. I do not recommend a discontinuance of flannel clothing in Egypt. I think it is quite as much wanted there as anywhere else.

" . . . The traveller should carry half a dozen

gimlets, stuck into a cork, and daily at hand. They serve as a bolt to doors which have no fastenings, as pins to anything he wants to fasten or keep open, as pegs to hang clothes, or watch, or thermometer upon; as a convenience in more ways than could be supposed beforehand. Two or three squares of Mackintosh cloth are a great comfort—for keeping bedding dry—for ablution, and for holding one's clothes in bathing. By substituting them for carpets, also, in Nile boats, there is a relief from danger of vermin.

“As for dress . . . instead of caps, the tarboosh, when within the cabin or tent, is the most convenient and certainly the most becoming headgear: and the little cotton cap worn under it is washed without trouble. Fans and goggles—goggles of black woven wire—are indispensable. No lady who values her peace on the journey, or desires any freedom of mind or movement, will take a maid. What can a poor English girl do who must dispense with home comforts, and endure hardships that she never dreamed of, without the intellectual enjoyments which to her mistress compensate (if they do compensate) for the inconveniences of Eastern travel ? ”

I like “if they do compensate.” She was obviously a bit uncertain. And I wish there were a picture of her in a tarboosh smoking a chibouque with a pint of porter at her side. For not only did Harriet Martineau wear a tarboosh, she drank porter and smoked a cigar.

XIV

I felt the same excitement mixed with dread which used to make me sick before going back to school as I drove for the first time through the green outskirts of Damascus on my way to report for duty. The approach from the west into the town itself is disappointing. Tram cars jangle along bleak streets flanked with ugly new buildings, and I felt rather depressed when I reported to G.S.I.(t.) (the letters stand for General Staff Intelligence (tribes)). The Colonel was out, and because there was no accommodation in the tiny Mess I decided to put up at the Omayad Hotel until I had time to look around for rooms.

Glittering black tanks with obscenely shaped guns slithered closer to me in my dream, a shell crashed against my tank, there was a deafening explosion, and I woke up. I lay sweating in the darkness for a while before I realized the explosion had been real.

I stumbled out of bed, drew open the French windows leading on to a tiny balcony and looked out. A cold, thin mist hovered over the roofs of Damascus spread below my window in the dark grey light before dawn, and a lamp twinkled from the window of every little house in the darkness so that it seemed as if a myriad candles had been lit by an invisible multitude. Then I remembered. The explosion I had heard was the cannon to wake the Faithful in time to eat before dawn because from sunrise to sunset they must fast in the feast of *Ramadan*.

When I reported to Colonel Elphinston the next

morning he greeted me kindly and sent his servant Abdullah for some coffee.

"I hear you speak French. I'm sending you across the road to the Délégation to work as assistant to Captain Oliver Myers who is our liaison officer with the French."

My heart sank. I had hoped for work with the tribes.

"We try hard in Damascus to get on with the French, and I think you'll find relations here as good as anywhere in Syria." He smiled at me benignly. "I hope you'll be happy in Damascus."

My head was aching again as I walked into Myers' office and saluted smartly. A thin, tired-looking Captain with a high complexion and sandy hair was sitting at a large desk beneath a huge map of Syria which filled the whole wall.

"How did you like the Elph? Good, isn't he? First man to ride into Damascus in the last war. And now he's liked by the French *and* the Arabs, which is saying a great deal."

Later he said, "I've needed an assistant for a long time. We're overworked in this office. The first thing I want you to do is to go out and buy some pins."

"Pins?"

"Pins with different coloured bobbles on the top for the map. Then we can see at a glance how many officers from various branches are represented in a village. Let's see. How many different colours do we need? British Political Officer, British Security Mission, Field Security Section, the O.C.P. Officer and then four French equivalents. That makes eight."

" But do you mean there might be eight officers in one small village ? "

" More. There might be two B.S.M. and two F.S.S. officers."

" Quite apart from representatives of any really secret organization ? "

" Oh, yes ! "

" No wonder there's trouble."

" Eight different colours," he said, " and it may take you several days to get them, but you'll learn your way about Damascus. Cheerio."

During those next few days I muttered angrily to myself as I trudged from shop to shop. Soon I began to vary the shape of my approach in French and Arabic to relieve the monotony. " Have you any pins ? "

" Do you keep coloured pins ? " " I need pins with coloured tops." " My aunt has a passion for blue pins." " My little brother requires green pins," and so on. But I can now perceive his wisdom. For I learned the streets of Damascus, the nature of its merchandise and the kindness of its shopkeepers.

After the ordeal by pins I was made to undergo the trial of being presented each day to an officer in the French Délégation, beginning the first day with the aspirant, and ending with the climax of General Collet.

I was looking through some old lists when I happened to see that I had been made a Captain.

" Technically," Myers said, smiling, " you should now be presented to each officer in the Délégation all over again, but I'll let you off."

" Your next job," said Myers, " will be to get our file of criminals into some sort of order."

I spent the next week trying to match the photograph of one scrofulous wretch with another. Turning through

the grim card index of murderers, bandits and dope-pedlars was like a nightmare game of "Snap."

"You need to know the lice beneath the log," he said.

Frequently police photographs are taken when the culprit has been several days in the cells, and the villainous expression, which is mainly due to lack of a razor, a comb and a mirror, is useless for identification. Also, I knew by now that some of the French junior officials were not gentle with Arab prisoners, especially those found guilty of political offences.

"Force is the only language they can understand," one of them said to me.

At that time the political situation was this: In June, 1941, when the British Ninth Army entered Syria, accompanied by a Free French detachment, General Catroux, in the name of General de Gaulle, proclaimed the independence of Syria and the Lebanon.

This guarantee of independence to Syria and the Lebanon was confirmed in the House of Commons by Mr. Churchill on September 9th, 1941.

But on June 24th, General de Gaulle issued a letter of instruction to General Catroux on his appointment as High Commissioner, which included the sentence: "Until the regime resulting from the treaties to be concluded is established—and this ought to take place as soon as possible—you should assume all the powers hitherto exercised by the High Commissioner of France in the Levant and all the responsibilities incumbent upon him."

And during 1941 and 1942 it was not considered advisable to hold elections in the two States, so government was carried on by Presidents selected by General

Catroux, and these Presidents appointed their own Cabinets subject to French approval.

By now "national independence" had become the slogan of every street-corner politician in the Levant. The Arabs rejoiced at the grant of independence. But, as the months passed by, and they saw no alleviation of French control, they began to believe that the promise of independence had been a trick to gain their support at a crucial moment. The Syrians had grown to loathe the French during the twenty years France held the Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon, and now their hatred was increased by the belief that they had been deceived (which was encouraged by agents of the Axis powers), and by their impotence before the armies of Britain and France, now stationed in and around Syria.

"We were promised immediate independence. Where is that independence?" they said, and in bitter memory of the three foreign armies on their soil during the last thirty years, they added: "Syria is like a harlot. Any man can come along and take us."

While the climate of emotions was thus uncertain, French officials should have moved cautiously until a treaty could be concluded and complete independence granted. They did not. They were generally second-rate; they were suspicious of the British and arrogant to the Arabs. I have never seen in France examples of such brutal stupidity displayed by such unpleasant types as I saw in Syria. Corrupted by Vichy, by long relish of superiority over the Arabs, and by the spoils obtained from the Levant, French officials were sometimes viciously cruel to those who had no power to

harm them—servants, prisoners or native soldiers. I knew splendid exceptions to this in all ranks, men of sincerity and kindness like General Collet and Colonel Reynier, and several junior officers with a love and understanding of Arabs. But the truth remains: French officialdom in the Levant was often brutish and corrupt.

When I arrived in Beirut the sound of a French voice was a joy to me. After I had been in Syria four months, if I heard a French voice I looked over my shoulder. It is only now, since I have been to Paris again, and realize what I had begun to forget—that the French in Syria did not represent France—it is only now that the voice is again a symbol to me of the tastes and manners which France has given to the world.

XV

Sarkis, the merchant, took me to an eighteenth-century house which he keeps mainly as a show-piece for his beautiful carpets which glorify the floors and enrich the walls. He led me across a marble courtyard, past a gaily splashing fountain to the rooms panelled in cedar-wood inlaid with coloured stones and pearls, which formerly housed the harem. The low, richly carved ceilings were also of cedar-wood, and the four wooden walls and ceiling of one room were made in separate sections in order that the whole could easily be moved and set up again as a small room within a larger. The harem is thus the forerunner of the pre-fabricated house.

Harriet Martineau “saw two Hareems in the East;

and it would be wrong to pass them over in an account of my travels; though the subject is as little agreeable as any I have to treat. . . .

“ The children born in large hareems are extremely few: and they are usually idolized, and sometimes murdered. . . . If a girl, she sees before her from the beginning the nothingness of external life, and the chaos of interior existence, in which she is to dwell for life. If a boy, he remains among the women until ten years old, seeing things when the eunuchs come in to romp, and hearing things among the chatter of the ignorant women which brutalize him for life before the age of rationality comes. . . .

“ All the younger ones were dull, soulless, brutish, or peevish. How should it be otherwise, when the only idea of their whole lives is that which, with all our interests and engagements, we consider too prominent with us?

“ . . . But for the importation of slaves, the upper classes, where polygamy runs riot, must soon die out. Large numbers are brought from the south—the girls to be made attendants or concubines in the hareem, and the boys to be made, in a vast proportion, those guards to the female part of the establishment whose mere presence is a perpetual insult and shame to humanity. The business of keeping up the supply of these miserable wretches—of whom the Pasha’s eldest daughter has fifty for her exclusive service—is in the hands of the Christians of Asyoot. It is these Christians who provide a sufficient supply, and cause a sufficient mortality to keep the number of the sexes pretty equal: in consideration of which we cannot much wonder that Christianity does not appear very venerable in the eyes of Mohammedans. . . .”

In a curious book, *The Harem*, by N. M. Penzer, I discovered that "To the Church, too, must be laid the guilt of countenancing the vile practice of castrating boys to preserve their voices for the Papal choir in the Sistine Chapel."

The seclusion of the harem is still the rule except amongst the enlightened sections of the middle and upper classes in the Arab lands where progress has come slowly during the last five hundred years because of remoteness and religious prejudice. The following description might be true of to-day:

" . . . This young creature, aged twelve, was the bride of the husband of fifteen. She was the most conspicuous person in the place, not only for the splendour of her dress, but because she sat on the deewan, while the others sat or lounged on cushions on the raised floor. The moment we took our seats I was struck with compassion for this child—she looked so grave and sad and timid. While the others romped and giggled, pushing and pulling one another about, and laughing at jokes among themselves, she never smiled, but looked on listlessly. I was determined to make her laugh before we went away; and at last she relaxed somewhat—smiling and growing grave again in a moment: but at length she really and truly laughed; and when we were shown the whole hareem, she also slipped her bare and dyed feet into her pattens inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and went into the courts with us, nestling close to us, and seeming to lose the sense of her new position for the time; but there was far less of the gaiety of a child about her than in the elderly widows."

XVI

Colonel Elphinstone in his kindness suggested that it might improve my health and my Arabic if for a week I did not attend the Délégation, but spent each day walking in the sunshine with Anis the interpreter.

Together we joyously explored the gardens and mountains and groves which make Damascus the most beautifully placed town in the East, while I jotted down all the words I did not know in a little note-book which now, with its list of phrases, restores to me the happiness of those days: "We meet, decide, garden, green, wall, wire, slope, mountain, descent, river, sit down, I invite you, *ana bitkalam*—I'm going to tell you something, *Qalilu min el Khamri eufarfeh qalb al insan*—A little wine makes glad the heart of man." Over the wine we became philosophical, and I find: "dream, mystery, appear, *il yaum nehne hon, bokra manaref wen*—here to-day, gone to-morrow." We stayed a long time drinking and talking in the magic garden and listening to the rushing water of the stream until the sun set and the air became cold, and as darkness and mist enshrouded the mountain we were downcast because we must return to the reality of Damascus, and Anis told me the saddest of all Arab proverbs: "The world is a poison which poisons the soul of man gradually—*Addounia sammoun essoumou el insanu tadrigian*."

The transliteration of oriental words is a vexed business in which even the experts differ. Thus one finds *beduin*, *bedouin*, *bedwin*, *badawin*, *bedowin* and *bedawin*. Harriet Martineau writes *bedoueen*.

I heard the first account of the decisive incident in the Murshid affair when I was lunching with General Collet. In Lattakia the game had reached a stalemate, and allied authorities decided to hold an inquiry. Both the protagonists were in any case leaving Lattakia, and it seemed as if peace were in sight, "When," said General Collet, "this type Evans-Pritchard, who by that time was completely deranged (*absolument détraqué*) sends General Montclar a dagger and invites him to commit suicide. . . . Worse still: that evening at a banquet in the General's honour when everyone stands to drink the General's health, Pritchard takes up his glass and flings it to the ground where it shatters in a thousand pieces."

I gathered from E.P. later his interpretation of these events which he did not deny took place. During the inquiry he was impressed by the scrupulous indifference with which Montclar's officers gave evidence, and as the inquiry proceeded his heart warmed towards him so that the day before Montclar's departure he was anxious to give him a present to show he had no ill feelings. Now he had given the most beautiful dagger in his collection to me on the day I left Lattakia for Damascus. However, there remained the next best, an exquisite dagger with a remarkably sharp blade, and this instrument he now ordered his servant to wrap carefully in paper and cardboard while he penned a suitable note to accompany his gift to the General.

"But what did you say in the note?"

"I can't remember. But it was something to the effect that I hoped he'd find the present acceptable and useful."

"You wrote it in English, I suppose?"

"Yes. Actually I thought that since it was an olive branch I'd write it to him for the first time in French."

But then I decided I had better stick to English." He explained what he had said.

Then I understood. And I could see the next scene only too well. E.P.'s odd-looking Arab servant arriving at the General's house and being suspiciously received; the General cautiously opening this parcel from the Englishman he considered a lunatic; the dagger falling with a clatter to the floor; the note being torn open; and the fatal sentence: "I do hope you will find this present acceptable *and will know what to do with it.*"

Meanwhile E.P., happily unaware of his present's reception, spent the afternoon in the mountains saying good-bye to the Alouite chieftains, and drove down just in time to attend the banquet in Montclar's honour. He was in a jovial mood and smiled affectionately at the General who looked at him a little oddly, he thought. However, at least he had sent him a present. If only he could think of some way to show his admiration of the General to all those present. Perhaps the opportunity would come when they rose to drink the General's health. That was it. He need not say anything—his French was inadequate, Arabic would be tactless, and English was incomprehensible to most present—he would drain his glass to the dregs and complete the toast in the old-fashioned way.

Thus it came about that as the guests, after taking a sip to drink Montclar's health, began to sit down, E.P. remained standing, tossed back the contents of his glass, and bowing courteously towards the General, flung his glass to the ground where it smashed to fragments.

XVII

There had been no time to change into uniform after the day's walk. And now as I walked back after a late dinner with some friends to the flat I shared with Myers, I was mildly hoping I would not meet the Provost Marshal, when I observed a civilian leaning over the side of the little bridge which spans the Barrada. I noticed him because for a moment I thought he was going to throw himself into the water, and it occurred to me that since the Barrada is only a few feet deep at that point he could be extricated easily. However, as I walked closer to the bridge I saw that he was looking not at the water but towards the gharry horses on the other side where drivers waited for stray fares. As I crossed the bridge he greeted me in Arabic.

“Good evening.”

“Good evening to you.”

“You speak Arabic?”

“No. Only a little.” I began to move away.

“Are you an officer?” From his black suit and tie I guessed he was an Arab waiter from the hotel.

“Yes.”

“Do you speak French?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you stop when you saw me standing on the bridge?” He spoke French with only a slight accent.

“How did you know I stopped?”

“I was listening to your footsteps.”

“I just thought of something, that's all,” I said evasively. He turned round and stared at my face.

"You're sure there was no other reason?" It was my turn to stare at him.

"What's it to do with you if there was?"

He smiled nervously. I noticed as he smiled that he was quite young—only about twenty-three or so. I had thought, perhaps from his neat dark clothes or perhaps from the little sags of flesh under his eyes, that he was older.

"Excuse me, please, if my question was indiscreet."

"Indiscreet?" I felt I was getting out of my depth.

"Yes. There obviously was a reason." For a moment I could think of nothing to say.

"Please tell me what it was?" he said. I checked a stupid impulse to run away and forgot I had ever seen him.

"Oh, well, if you insist. I thought you were going to jump in."

"To kill myself?"

"Yes."

He laughed, rather pleasantly. He sounded relieved of some worry.

"You had never seen me before?"

"Never in my life."

"And I have never seen you before in my life," he said, smiling up at me. He was small and delicately made, more like a bedu than a Syrian, with wide eyes and a firm mouth. But his hands twisted nervously together as he stood looking at me.

"You wonder now what my question was about," he said, in such a friendly way that I did not like to rebuff him. Besides, I was rather intrigued.

"What was it about?"

The haunted look had vanished, and he was now almost cheerful.

"I had never seen you before, but I wanted to know if *you* had seen *me* before," he said. "But how could you have seen me if I did not see you?" he asked, smiling.

"In lots of ways. You might have been looking the other way, for instance."

"In lots of ways. That's it. In lots of ways. I might have been asleep." He seemed to relish his mystery.

"Will you have a drink?" he asked suddenly.

"I think every place is shut."

He fished in his coat pocket and produced a half bottle of brandy.

"There's a coffee place still open where the drivers go. We can drink this there if you like."

I hesitated. I was not dressed as an officer.

"All right."

The dingy café was not far from the bridge. I ordered two Turkish coffees and two glasses.

"At least the coffee is on me," I said as he poured out the brandy. "That's enough. Really."

"I'll show you how to drink this stuff," he said, and poured himself out a full tumbler.

"*Santé.*"

"*A la votre.*" He drank deeply.

"What's your name?"

"Faris."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one," he said. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-six. Do you work in Damascus?"

"I used to. But now I work in Beirut. I have only come here to see my mother. To-morrow I shall return to Beirut." He swallowed another gulp of brandy. His face was flushed and his fingers writhed nervously.

"Are you a Christian?"

He saw what I meant and smiled. "Yes. But nowadays many Moslems drink."

"I know. What is your job?"

"I work in a shop."

"What kind of a shop?"

"I work in Beirut."

"But what kind of a shop?"

He did not seem to hear my question. Suddenly I saw that his hands were trembling. I looked up at his face. He was staring at a gharry-driver sitting at the next table. I glanced at the driver. He was a stout, red-faced man in a tattered black coat. There was nothing frightening about him. I turned to Faris. Then I noticed he was not staring at the driver but at the whip which was leaned against the wall by the man's table.

"Faris. Faris."

"Yes?" He turned away with an effort.

"What kind of shop do you work in?"

"Do you see that whip?" he said. He was breathing heavily.

"Yes."

"Oh, it is cruel, cruel. Look out of the window. By the lamp-post do you see that horse? Look at the way the haunch bones jerk out of its flesh. Look at the skeleton of its ribs. And if a fare comes the driver will lash it into a trot with that whip. He will lash it until blood comes."

He paused for a moment, staring wildly.

"You want to know about me, don't you? Well, I'll tell you. I was born on a farm. I grew up with animals. I was the only child and I had no friends to play with. But the animals were my friends, and my

parents who were good Christians taught me to be kind to them. When my father died the farm was sold and my mother brought me to Damascus. I was about twelve years old and I remember quite well I was standing one wet day on that bridge where we met, when a horse pulling a gharry slipped and fell. The driver leapt down with his whip and began slashing it. The frightened horse stumbled again and sprawled on the ground. The driver got furious and struck it horribly with his whip. I was frightened. But I could bear it no longer. I rushed to the driver and begged him to stop. I tried to snatch the whip away from him. Then he raised his whip and slashed me across the face. And while I stood dazed he slashed at my chest. I ran away crying to my mother, who told me that men were cruel to animals because no one had taught them that animals are our friends. I promised that evening I would dedicate my life to stopping cruelty to animals."

He drank deeply and coughed. His eyes were glittering.

"As the years went by I discovered and tried to stop all kinds of cruelty to animals. In the East we treat our animals far worse, I am told, than you do. I fought against this cruelty. You have no idea how many devices men have for being cruel to beasts. There are the long raking whips of the gharry-drivers, the spiked goad for the poor little donkey, the sharp thong for the mule, the bar of nails attached to the camel's cheek so that it must follow in the caravan or the nails stick into it, and the long spurs of the riders. All these I tried to stop. I tried to prevent animals being beaten beneath their load day after day until they dropped dead. And when I got tired or despondent I would think of that horse on the Barrada bridge. I would think of the

blows raining down on its heaving flanks, and I would go on working. I met others who felt as I did in a society for preventing this cruelty, and gradually we began to make progress by teaching drivers that animals were their friends and by stopping, partially at least, the manufacture of some of the more cruel devices."

He lowered his voice so that it came out with a curious hissing sound. His fingers never stopped writhing together as he spoke.

"A year ago my friends made me join a political youth club. Previously I hadn't been much interested in politics, but at this club I saw for the first time the importance of laws and of freedom. It was as if I had lived all my life without being able to see the stars and the moon but now could observe them for the first time. I now had a second cause, the cause of my country's liberty. I volunteered to take a part in the demonstration which was being planned. Well, I dare say you heard about it. The crowd got out of control. There were accidents and property was damaged. That night three members of our committee were arrested by the French police. I was one of them. They wanted the names of the rest."

All his limbs were trembling now, and his eyes were staring horribly into the corner.

"I was put into a cell by myself. The door was slammed, and I was left alone until noon the next day, when a soldier came in and fastened a bandage tight round my eyes.

"'What's that for?' I asked. He said I would see in time. He told me to strip. Then I understood. I was going to be beaten. The bandage was so that I could not see who was beating me. The soldier tore the last clothes from my body when he heard footsteps

approaching the door. Then I heard a click as the door opened. I heard the stamp of his feet as he sprang to attention. I heard two people, two people, walk into my cell."

His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper, and his hands were clenched together.

"Then I heard one of them say, '*Quelle jolie buste à fouetter!*'"

I started. The whole timbre of his voice had changed. The accent was so perfect and vivid that for a moment I thought I recognized the voice.

"What a nice body to beat!" he repeated. "Then I heard the whistle of the whip as it screamed down on my naked body, and my flesh was seared with pain. I tried not to cry out, but the anguish was terrible as he lashed into me. Then suddenly as the fresh bars of pain pierced me and I felt the blood trickling down my sides, I thought, 'This is how the poor horse feels when his flanks are slashed by the driver. My body is quivering like his. Blood is oozing from me as I have seen it from him.' Then I must have lost consciousness, for when I woke up sticky with blood I was alone.

"I could recognize the voice of the man who beat me. The other man never spoke. The soldier told me it was an English officer, but I think he said that because he knew I liked the English. But I'm never sure. I'm never sure."

He gulped down his brandy. "If you'll excuse me. I feel rather ill. I think I should go home," he said thickly.

- We got up. He stood trembling by the table.

"After a bit they got tired of beating me about, and I was released. I returned to Damascus." He was still staring at the whip.

"The next day I was walking along the street when I saw a driver slashing at his horse. As I ran forward to plead with him, and if that failed to wrest the whip from him by force, suddenly I thought, 'That horse might be me and it isn't.' And I"

His voice came in hoarse gasps.

"I was glad. I was glad. Suddenly I wanted to say to the driver, 'Go on. Lam into him. Slash him hard.'"

He swayed a little and buried his face in his hands. Then he looked up with bloodshot eyes.

"Perhaps I'll get decent again. Perhaps one day I'll look at those starved horses on the bridge and feel as I did as a boy. It was all right then. I hated it then. I swear I did. I've come out the wrong side now, that's all. I'm just vicious. And I work in the right place."

He began to retch, and stumbled to the door. I tried to help him.

"Leave me alone, I beseech you. Good night," he said quickly, and rushed away.

The squalid proprietor came in to be paid for the coffee. He spoke in French, so I asked him if he knew where Faris worked. He gave me a wink.

"I don't know if you'd call it work. He's the boy in a brothel in Beirut."

XVIII

I went to see the dervishes dance to the accompaniment of a ragged male chorus and tambourines. At first a soloist, with his hand to his ear so that he can

listen to the Word of God, sings slowly and mournfully. Presently the chorus starts singing in time to the rhythm of their feet as they march forwards and backwards shouting to Allah. The voice of the singer is raised, the music grows wilder and more passionate, the thud and jangle of the tambourine mark the throb of the swelling chorus, and one little boy and four men walk quickly, as if in a trance, into the circle and begin to twirl round slowly and gracefully on one spot. As they turn quicker the white skirts of their robe swirl out into the air and stand away from their thighs. The insistence of the music is frantic now, the dancers, entranced, their hands clasped behind their necks or stretched out into the air with their heads perched on one side, are whirling faster and faster, round and round on the same spot. And nothing seems certain except the whirling of the dancers, round and round, fixed in their circle, wrapt in their trance, until the music fades, the humming finishes, the rhythm slows down, the tops spin slower and slower and without sound turn round once more and circle from the floor.

XIX

A few days later, Mehdi's uncle, the Sharif Abdullah, an old man who was a good friend of the British in Lattakia, meddled in politics and was sent into *residence forcée* by the French. Colonel Elphinston protested, but to no effect.

About this time, too, I heard that Peter, whom I had last seen when he visited me in hospital, had been killed fighting in the Western Desert.

XX

A week later (for various reasons now unimportant), George Lawrence and I were asked to visit the villages of the Hauran. We were both glad to leave the routine of the office in Damascus for a few days, and we set off eagerly one morning in a staff car. The metalled road runs straight across the lonely, volcanic plain strewn with rocks, boulders and small black stones. At first we talked of office things, or tribal feuds or of the Roman remains in the tiny villages. But as the days passed we were content to settle back into silence and speak only when we wished to share our thoughts.

Outside the office I tried to forget the war, because I could not bear to think of my friends fighting while I was in safety. But the flat, open plains of the Hauran reminded me of the Western Desert, and for a while I thought miserably of my regiment waiting in the sand at Alamein for the day of battle.

One prong of the Axis pincer movement had been stopped west of the Suez Canal, another prong had reached the Caucasus. We had moved troops from Persia, from Iraq and from Syria to meet Rommel at Alamein. If the Germans invaded the Arabian peninsula from the north, the Allies had too few troops to hold Syria, and would be obliged to fight a delaying action. I knew of an organization which was working out a plan for operations in the northern hills after the enemy had advanced southward. The officers and men, who were all British, worked in secrecy, but I knew as much about it as concerned my work.

We had reached a jumble of black stone huts

rambling up a little hill. One troop of Circassian cavalry was billeted in the village; and the Circassian Lieutenant, a tall, gaunt man, invited us to join his men round the fire as they sat cross-legged drinking coffee. George Lawrence chatted happily with them in Arabic while I did my best to follow what was said and examined the troopers squatting stiffly round the circle in their smart tunics and breeches and black riding-boots. They were fair skinned, and their smooth, hairless faces were wiry and tough. They were all young; one of them looked no more than sixteen. Discipline was obviously strict; they were in awe of the Lieutenant, and when we asked them questions they answered shyly. Presently the Lieutenant suggested we might like to ride round the village. The two youngest were sent to bring their horses.

Of all animals before Man I think the horse is the most beautiful, but I have never been able to persuade myself that he is an intelligent one. If he is given the chance to put his foot into a rabbit-hole, or get his neck entangled in a gate, he will. He lacks any sense of self-preservation. However, he has a long memory, his capacity for affection is the reward of kindness, and his extreme beauty excuses any mental deficiencies. Perhaps I underrate his intelligence because I am no horseman; I only ride occasionally. But I notice that the horse of the really horsey man behaves just as stupidly, when he isn't looking, as mine does.

The Circassian horses led up to us by the two young troopers were beautifully groomed, their satin skin rippled in the sunshine, and the harness gleamed. Mine was a lovely animal. He was lithe and strong, quivering with power, his nostrils dilated—nervously impatient of restraint. The skin curved smoothly over

his round, firm haunches, his head tossed into the air, and his nervous fretting had brought a patch of damp sweat to his delicate neck. The boy held the bridle as I mounted. Directly the horse felt weight on the stirrup he pranced and capered like a lunatic. He reared and snorted and stamped, and though I said nice things to him in Arabic and patted his neck, he was wild and restive all the way round the village, and I felt his urgent force straining between my legs to gallop away into freedom.

The two troopers were waiting for their horses when we returned. By now my horse was covered in lather and trembling with excitement. The boy held the bridle as I dismounted. Suddenly the horse jerked his head, the boy lost hold of the bridle, and I nearly fell. I stepped off and led the horse up to him. As I handed him the reins he flinched violently. Then I understood the look in his eyes. He expected I was going to hit him. I cursed my inadequate Arabic.

"Thank you for the horse," I said. "He is a very good horse. And you are a very good trooper."

I shook his hand. "Good-bye," I said. "May Allah preserve you."

He looked at me with large eyes in silence. But as I walked away to the car I heard him softly say "Good-bye," and then something I did not catch.

When we drove away I looked back. He was standing with his legs apart, in the same place I had left him. His left hand was on his hip, his right hand was raised in a gesture of farewell, and he stared after us. When I looked back later, the streets of the village were empty except for a tiny figure standing with feet apart and right hand raised to say good-bye. He was still standing there when the village passed out of sight.

At that moment a mass of disconnected thoughts I had known during the last three months clicked into place in my brain, and I saw my plan clearly. During the dark drive back to Damascus across the bleak, rain-swept plains I reduced the idea sprawling across my mind into paragraphs and sentences. Darkness came, and the headlights peered out on to the road ahead, while wind and rain lashed about the car. But in my imagination I was already in Damascus, the pen in my hand, and the sheet of paper lay flat and white on the table. The first draft, finished before dawn, was typed and given to Colonel Elphinston the next morning.

If the Germans invaded N. Arabia in great strength to-morrow, I wrote, the Allies would be obliged to fight a delaying action. A gradual and general withdrawal might take place. But a few small units of Arabs led by a British officer could stay behind in hiding. When the Allied forces had withdrawn, and when the enemy's lines of communication were well stretched, these small units could not only transmit valuable information and do useful sabotage, but they could carry out raids from concealed positions on the enemy supply line.

It is not true that all German convoys are alert and well protected. Their equivalent to our 'A' echelon which brings ammunition, petrol, food and water to their forward tanks, is generally well protected and alert. Their 'B' echelon is often given tank protection. But their main supply lorries from base move along a fixed track marked every 50 metres or so by petrol tins or signs mounted on posts. The lorries, though fairly well dispersed, are not

alert. Despite statements by the authors of military manuals on the subject (who evidently have not themselves driven along a 200-mile supply line, week in and week out), the convoy driver cannot keep constantly alert. The very length of the track or road exercises a hypnotic effect. "The second driver," you sometimes read, "should be alert, watching for possible enemy activity." But in fact the second driver, who has driven through the previous night, is generally fast asleep. At halts the look-out man is fond of reading *Die Blonde im Venedig*. You can lie exposed on the flat desert, feeling as big as Vesuvius and they will pass you by. You can drive a British 15-cwt. through a German convoy and get away with it.

Such unprotected convoys, travelling a hundred miles or so on the safe side of the battle front, can be successfully surprised by a small band of determined men. . . .

The bands would be trained to expect no help from outside population—not even from friendly chiefs who, at the most, could only be expected to provide temporary rest, food and a guide to a safe place. . . .

I waited the rest of that day in suspense. The next morning I made myself wait until noon before walking round to the office. I was greeted cheerfully by Bryan Guinness.

"The Colonel wants to see you."

I stiffened myself and knocked on the door.

"Hello, Robin. I thought I was going to have to go off to Beirut, so I wrote out what I thought for you.

Here it is. You can look at it and, if you like, you can attach it to your plan."

"Thank you, sir."

He handed me a page of notes which I took eagerly and walked into the ante-room.

This is a very interesting paper, well worked out.

The difficulties we are up against in putting it into effect are two:

- (a) The lack of local personnel of a type we can rely on to undertake such work and carry it through.
- (b) The fact that, except in the very mountainous districts, these bands would probably be given away by other local inhabitants and liquidated.

Both these difficulties could be overcome in the Alouite country, and in certain parts of the Lebanon where the country is suitable and the people tough. They might also be overcome in the Druze country. . . .

Outside in the ante-room I heard the door from the street open, the clatter of heavy boots coming to attention, and then a voice say:

"Good morning, sir!"

"Hello, Ernest! How are you?"

The door into the study opened and they both walked in.

"Hello, laddie, fancy seeing you here! Sorry I missed you in Aleppo. Did you get on all right?"

The Colonel showed Altounyan the memo which he took and read slowly, with that curiously intent concentration which seemed to be derived from every limb.

Then he said to the Colonel: "I think I'd better take him to see Glubb, don't you, sir?"

"Yes. That might be a good idea."

"Meet me at the Orient Palace for dinner at eight," said Altounyan. "So long."

The car turned and twisted rapidly as it climbed the serpentine road up the side of the mountain between Jericho and Amman. I knew the skill of Elias, the lean young bedouin who was Altounyan's driver, and I looked comfortably at the river-bed far below in the valley. The air grew colder, and Altounyan leaned back and drew out a heavy, fleece-lined coat which he spread across our knees.

"Excited, laddie?"

"Very."

"We'll go straight to his house. I shall leave you alone to talk with him."

"But . . ."

"It's your plan and you've got to explain it."

"You knew Lawrence, didn't you?"

He was silent. I looked at him. I think he knew what was coming.

"Of the two, Lawrence and Glubb, I mean, which do you think the greater?" Even as I spoke the last word I felt it was stupid and inappropriate.

Altounyan was quiet for so long that I began to think he would not answer. Then he said:

"This one."

Outside the little house in Amman, three soldiers from the Arab Legion stood talking in a shelter from the

wind. They sprang to attention. Glubb Pasha was expecting us, they said. We climbed up a flight of wooden stairs. His wife and small son greeted us at the door. Altounyan introduced me, and presently Glubb led me to his study.

"Sit down. I think you'll find that chair the most comfortable. Now. What can I do for you ?" He sat down in a chair opposite me and produced a string of amber beads, and began playing with them, holding the string in his left hand so that the beads slipped one by one through the fingers of his right hand.

I handed him a copy of the plan. While he slowly read it, I observed him carefully. I could not help feeling disappointed. The stories I had heard from officers and Arabs, during the last three months, of this Englishman who commanded the Arab Legion, had woven a glorious tapestry in my mind. I knew that he had fought in the 1914 war and had won a Military Cross. Part of his jaw had been shot away, therefore the Arabs called him "Abu Hunaik" or "Father of a Jaw." As a young official in the Colonial Office he had come out to Iraq soon after the Armistice, and there the legend began. He dived fully clothed into the Tigris to rescue two Arabs. He settled disputes between warring tribes, he lived many years among the bedouin who now loved him. Succeeding Peake as Commander-in-Chief of the Forces of the Emir Abdullah, he persuaded the feckless and independent bedouin youths to leave their tribes and join the Desert Brigade of the Legion which he welded into a tough, reliable force. This Brigade was the leading reconnaissance force in the British advance to relieve Baghdad in 1941. Glubb was given a D.S.O. The Arab Legion was now recognized as an essential element for desert control. But if Glubb was admired

by the British in the Levant, he was adored by the Arabs. I had heard stories of his kindness and generosity and courage. And this man, whom the Arabs worshipped, sat before me.

He was middle-aged and small of stature, with thin, white-grey hair, pale blue eyes and a bushy, iron-grey moustache. About his face there was an expression of gentleness and sensitivity. His manner was shy and diffident. His appearance gave no hint of the resolute leader I had imagined.

He finished the notes, and put the folder on his desk.

“ May I keep this? ”

“ Yes, sir. ”

“ Well. What can I do for you? ”

“ I need your advice, sir, and your help. ”

While I explained, he leaned back, and I felt that he was studying me.

When I had finished, he paused for a while. Then he began to speak in a slow, even voice, quietly and without emphasis. And it was as if a dynamo had suddenly been switched on. The great wheel turned silently on its axis, and its quietness made the power it generated the more impressive. I was conscious of an intense force radiating from him, which kept me taut and on edge, so that I was exhausted from the effort of concentration when I left his room two hours later.

Though I have notes to guide my memory, I am surprised how vividly I remember what he said that afternoon.

“ Your scheme is good so far as it goes, ” he said, “ but how are you going to find and train the officers you need? It’s not only a question of teaching them Arabic, though that’s going to be difficult enough in the time available. First of all, you’ve got to find the right

men. Selection of the right people is much more important than the definition of their duties. You must remember that Arabs are by no means inferior to us in intelligence. They're as efficient as the ordinary Englishman in ordinary life. Their main failing is that they lack public spirit. But every Arab will immediately see through an inefficient or unpleasant officer. Arabs are very quick to size up the people they're dealing with. They can *sense* if an officer really sympathizes with them and loves their people. They react most strongly to other people's emotions because they are temperamental themselves. That's why it's more important to choose the right individuals than the right policy.

"A knowledge of the language is obviously essential, but the officers you need have also got to know the people and the country. Even if they're young and the right stuff, it will take some time for them to learn. By the time they've learned, the need for post-occupational work may have vanished."

"Their training wouldn't have been wasted," I said, "they would be useful after the war as officials out here."

"I agree," he said, "and we need them. At the end of the last war we declared that all the Arab countries were about to be independent. As a result, no civil service for these countries was ever formed. We gave the impression we were just about to leave North Arabia bag and baggage, so no capable or ambitious young man was willing to take a job there. Officials were recruited on the site from anybody who could be picked up. Most of them were Army officers who doubted their ability to find a job in civilian life.

"If you can get the right men—officers and N.C.O.s

who are fond of the people and want to stay in the Middle East after the war—and train them for work with these Arab bands, they could form the nucleus of a training centre for British officials after the war.

“ Psychology is only beginning to explain the difficult reactions human beings suffer when they feel themselves inferior to others. This feeling of inferiority accounts for nearly all the friction between Asiatics and Europeans. Our policy towards most Asiatic nations during the last forty years has been generous. We have genuinely tried to give wider powers to the people. Yet our efforts seem to arouse hatred and resentment. The future of the world depends on whether this resentment can be eliminated.

“ Our policy may be generous. But though people may pretend to be solely interested in policy, in reality human beings are more concerned with themselves than with anyone else. And if individual Asiatics are harbouring personal resentment complexes, our policy will be received with dislike. Their complexes are mainly social—being turned out of one of our clubs, being insulted by a British soldier, or snubbed by a supercilious official. Our snobbery has made us more enemies than our policy.

“ Though officials nowadays seldom ill-treat the natives, they make friends with them less than they used. They tend to live in closed communities, cut off from the peoples. The improvement in communications is largely responsible. The journey to the East was formerly so long and slow that officials coming out from Europe would stay ten or fifteen years without returning home on leave. Now people go on leave every year or so, and their mental outlook remains European as a result. Letters and newspapers arrive

in a few days. One can listen to London on the radio'" (he pronounced it "rahdio") "several times a day. More officers are married and bring out wives who aren't a bit interested in 'the natives.' They expect their husbands to play tennis or drive out with them as soon as they get back from the office. By expecting their husbands to entertain them, the wives indirectly prevent them from mixing with the people whose land they inhabit. There are exceptions, but they are too few.

"Officials used to move about on a horse or by camel. This meant breaking their journey each night at a local village. To-day they dash out by car, do their official business, and are back for cocktails with their wives.

"Officials are often chained to their desks by all the paper and figures of bureaucracy, by telephone calls and telegram. They stay sweating in their offices, when they ought to be out on tour, sleeping and eating with all classes, in police huts, in villages, in tribal camps, with the rich landowners and the poor fellahin.

"In the East half the art of government is to know how to talk and to get on with people. Writing is a secondary accomplishment. Where social habits clash, the official must conform to the local customs. The only way to understand people is to know and to like them. And government is a matter of dealing with people, not paper.

"If the Germans invade North Arabia, I believe your idea will be valuable. I will certainly do anything I can to help. I could take some of the officers and N.C.O.s you select and send them out on attachment with the Legion. But concentrate on the training side of your scheme, and you will create something

of permanent value. The East, above all, wants leaders and has none."

During the cold, dark journey back from Amman, Altounyan and I discussed what he had said, and gradually we formed the idea of a large building, remote for security, which would accommodate the instructors and the instructed, who would eat and live together, with no barrier between the "staff" and "students." An instructor in Arabic would be given lessons in explosives by a young sapper. Each man would instruct the others on the subject in which he was expert.

"It's the spirit of a Centre like this which is all-important," said Altounyan. "Over the door we ought to have written, 'Pedants Keep Out!'"

XXI

Even now, as I sit writing these words in a little room in Sussex, and can look up once more to confirm the well-remembered shape of the cherry tree outside, even now, I can only just manage to smile at the importance the plan for an Arab Centre assumed in my mind three years ago. Long after the rapture and anguish are finished, you think you can afford to look back with a pitying smile on the pains of unrequited love. But then, suddenly, from the past a pang of misery strikes across your heart, like a shadow across the brightness of a field. For an instant you feel a tug on the cord which binds you to the past. And you know that you have grown what you are, not only because of your prudent labours, but also because of your foolishness and vanity.

We are all of one piece, created from yesterday and to-morrow. Thus, it is but wryly that I can grin at the desperate efforts I made to get the Arab Centre started; for my hopes and eagerness and disappointment have become part of me; and no man enjoys laughing at himself.

I spent a week in Damascus working out draft notes for the Centre, which I sent to Colonel Elphinstone. He approved the plan, attached it to my previous memo, and sent the folder to Brigadier Clayton, the head of the Middle East Intelligence Centre in Cairo.

I waited in suspense. Sometimes I was afraid I would not get fit in time to take an active part in my own plan; for, of course, my personal motive in urging the need for irregular Arab detachments was to lead one myself.

A few mornings later the Colonel summoned me. As I saluted I saw from his smile that he had good news for me.

"You're to fly to Cairo immediately and report to Brigadier Clayton."

My heart sang with happiness as the plane rose into the limpid sky. I got a lift in a lorry from Heliopolis into town, and I just had time to report to M.E.I.C. before the office shut at eight-thirty. I then triumphantly took a taxi back to my hotel through the streets of Cairo which seemed hot and dusty after the cold clean air of Damascus.

The next morning I knew from certain unmistakable signs that I had jaundice.

XXII

The fifteenth General (Scottish) Hospital in Cairo was, to my mind, the best hospital in the Middle East. I may be prejudiced by my good fortune there. Two officers shared a ward, and my companion, also suffering from jaundice, was Ronald Lunt, padre of the Guards Brigade. As he recovered he made his illness the occasion for a sedate but prolonged party. Clergymen and Guardsmen streamed in to visit their padre, until Sister limited the number of visitors he might receive at one time. We found we shared interests and sometimes friends, and his help with the Centre plan encouraged me to begin to re-write my first version; for as the weeks passed by it became less likely that Germany would invade Northern Arabia; and now that I had seen in hospital fine officers and N.C.O.s who would never be fit again for battle, and whose talents would probably be wasted in jobs at Base, I was determined that the Arab Centre must be started while this material was available.

I was fortunate in the doctor who looked after me. Major Michael Kremer was mildly bored by my jaundice, but, as the head neurologist, he was interested in the effects of my head injury. With amazing patience he began a long examination. He tapped and prodded and photographed and questioned. The X-ray revealed two small bits of shrapnel embedded safely in the skull. The scales showed that I had lost two stone in weight since leaving England. What his notes were proving I did not know.

Soon after he had begun his examination he told me

that an officer from the regiment was in the hospital.

"He's had a pretty bad time of it, your friend Dick has. When he came in you could almost see daylight through his head. He was unconscious for two months. It wasn't all that easy with a man that size. He's a giant, isn't he? Anyway, his mind is beginning to come back. He can walk about the wards, so he could come up and visit you. It might be a help to him if you could talk about things you both knew about in the past. Your friends in the regiment and so on. His sight has gone on one side, and he can't co-ordinate his muscles properly. But he's getting better slowly. I think you could help."

Dick appeared that afternoon after tea. His huge frame moved unsteadily with tottering gestures. His face was dead white.

"Hullo, Robin. Hullo, Robin. Nice to see you. I'm afraid I can't stay long. You see I'm very busy. I have a lot of things to do. They're written in my little note-book. Now where's my little note-book. Oh, dear, I think I've lost it."

He searched frantically in every pocket.

"Yes. I've lost it. I shall have to go and find it. Otherwise I shan't know what I have to do. And you see I'm very busy, very busy. So long."

I tried to distract him from the note-book. But it loomed in his mind like a beacon. However, he appeared again the next evening, and as I talked of old friends of his in the regiment sometimes a name would connect in his mind, and a spurt of conversation would spring from him. Once in excitement from a spark of memory he rose from his chair. For a moment he stood awkwardly looking down at it. Then he smiled at me apologetically.

"It's a very difficult business, you see."

He stood facing the chair for a few minutes.

"No, that's wrong."

He turned round and walked away from it, and returned to it from a different angle. All his movements were uncertain. But he was patient and persevering. At last he sat down again.

In the pride of our strength of body and mind we forget our infirmity. A particle of dust can destroy our body, a little piece of bone jutting out the fraction of an inch can damage our intelligence so that we cannot tell left from right, the crude jest of a coachman made to us in childhood can warp our mind, the invisible poison of the world can destroy our soul, the chance meeting to-morrow may lead us to perdition. Body and spirit lie naked, exposed to the winds of chance.

I that in heill was and gladness,
Am trublit now with great sickness
And feblit with infirmitie:—
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Our plesance here is all vain glory,
This fals world is but transitory
The flesh is bruckle, the Feynd is slee:—
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The state of man does change and vary,
Now sound, now sick, now blyth, now sary,
Now dansand mirry, now like to die:—
Timor Mortis conturbat me. . . .

Since for the Death remeid is none,
Best is that we for Death dispone,
After our death that live may we:—
Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The fear of death does not disturb me; it is the fear of being maimed in body or spirit which drenches my sheets with sweat. God save me.

XXIII

Gradually Dick's memory began to return, so that we could discuss men we knew in the regiment and rehearse comic incidents in training in England, such as the occasion of the bridging demonstration when the bridge, instead of falling forwards on to the river, fell backwards on to the spectators.

"You must meet Fred," he said one day.

"Who is Fred?"

"My stable companion. He's still more barmy than I am."

He appeared the next afternoon with a small, trim officer who carried himself stiffly erect and stared at me with blazing blue eyes.

"Have a drink?" he said. "Have a drink?"

"This is Fred," said Dick. "He's absolutely nuts. Aren't you, Fred?"

They both rolled with laughter. They were incredibly happy and carefree like children, except when Dick lost his note-book. Dick was obviously proud of his friend, who looked a dwarf beside him.

"Fred's learning to read, aren't you, Fred?"

"Have a drink? Sorry. Yes," said Fred, "I'm reading again. That is, they're teaching me to read. I can't read, you see. Awfully stupid book I have to read from. It's called *The Happy Hen*. It really is."

They rocked with laughter.

"But the nurse is awfully pretty," said Fred. "I wish I could be alone with her on the top of a haystack. With some bottles of beer, of course."

At that moment Michael Kremer appeared with a

Brigadier Medical Officer whom he was showing round.

"What's wrong with this man?" asked the Brigadier. "He looks perfectly all right to me."

Michael whispered something. The Brigadier stared at Fred.

"How old are you?"

A look of bewilderment overcast Fred's seraphic expression. He thought for a long time, with his brows wrinkled in the effort of concentration. One could see that it was a difficult problem. Then the grooves vanished, and his face was uplifted and radiant with triumph.

"Sixty-seven," said Fred.

"No," Michael said gently. "Try to think, Fred." Fred tried. His forehead was furrowed with anxiety.

"Four," Fred said hopefully.

"Now touch your right knee with your left hand," Michael said, quietly and slowly. "Your right knee with your left hand."

His left hand moved hesitantly towards his shoulder.

"Your right knee with your left hand."

The hand trembled a little as it moved towards his elbow.

"We're both down for lumbar punctures," Dick said proudly after they had left. "They drain all the fluid from our brains so they can see what's there. I bet they don't see much in poor Fred."

"Have a drink?" said Fred cheerfully.

A few weeks later Michael asked me to escort the two of them on their first excursion from the hospital, to have tea at Groppi's. The great tea shop was crowded when we arrived, and I was wondering whether to take

Dick's arm, for he was still blind on one side, when from his pocket Fred produced a large, extremely dirty pocket handkerchief, which he unfolded and held at arm's length so that Dick should see the verge of the tables. Then he marched stiffly forward, followed by his giant. They ate hugely but rather erratically, and each time one of them took up a fork to stir his tea, or dropped his knife into his ice they would both laugh till tears rolled down their cheeks. They devoured their way through hot buttered toast, chocolate cakes and ice-creams, and then began all over again with hot buttered toast and chocolate éclairs, which they ate indifferently.

The next morning they appeared by my bedside heaving with laughter at some joke so funny that for a while they could not tell it to me.

"When we got back to the ward yesterday," Dick said, "I noticed a great bag of bananas by Fred's bed. I thought he'd been brought a present. After we'd turned in Fred said to me, 'Have a banana,' so I said, 'Well, I don't mind if I do.' So we both had a banana. They were jolly good. So we both had another. Well, we got talking. And the bananas were so nice that before we knew where we were we'd eaten the whole lot of them."

"Every single one," said Fred.

"And they didn't belong to Fred at all but to the chap in the bed next door."

"And he never did like us much."

This kept them happy for hours.

I was released from hospital a few days before Christmas, and I invited friends I met, who had no

better invitation, to lunch with me at Maxim's on Christmas Day. The party was mainly for the benefit of Dick and Fred, who were by now allowed out of hospital alone for a few hours in the afternoon. For some reason Fred was convinced it was Easter, and cheerfully greeted all he met with, "Happy Easter to you! Have a drink?" while Dick's huge frame trembled with mirth.

Ronnie and I spent a teetotal Christmas, because jaundice patients were not supposed to touch alcohol for at least a month. However, that evening I met Michael Kremer at a party in John Watson's flat.

"What's that you're drinking?"

"Lemonade."

"Do you promise you won't drink when I'm not there?"

"Yes."

"Then you can take this," he said, and poured me out a small tot of whisky and a long draught of soda.

"Happy Christmas!"

XXIV

I had delivered the revised draft of my plan to the office, but Brigadier Clayton had gone into hospital over Christmas for a sinus operation, in order to save time and avoid festivities which jarred his diffident nature. He looked tired and ill when he sent for me.

"I've read your paper. I think it is interesting. Some of us down here were working on a similar idea some months ago. It would be useful to get the reactions to it of men like Cornwallis in Iraq, and Mac-

Michael in Palestine. I think you might go and see all the Chiefs concerned so we can get their comments before we go further. It will mean a lot of travelling. Do you think you're strong enough?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Report to me when you get back."

I sat in the bar drinking lemonade as I waited for Michael Kremer, with whom I was dining. My suitcase was packed, and my plane left from Heliopolis at eight o'clock the next morning.

"Sorry I'm late. What's that you're drinking?"

"Lemonade."

"If you really want, you can have a small glass of dry sherry."

"I really want it."

"I believe the only reason you dine with me is because I sometimes let you drink."

"That's it," I said.

"How are you feeling?"

"All right."

"You wouldn't lie to me, would you?"

"Oh, no," I said, crossing my fingers.

But at dinner I could eat nothing. As I sat through the meal, crumpling up little pieces of bread in my fingers, Michael made no comment, and we discussed my plan, because I wanted his advice about the employment of officers who had been wounded and were unfit to return to the front. However, when we moved to a little table in the monstrously Oriental lounge, he gave me a professional look.

"When does your plane go?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Why don't you take your convalescent leave?"
"There isn't time."

For a moment we were silent. Then I said, "Look, Michael, will you forget for the next half-hour that you're my doctor?"

"Certainly."

"Promise?"

"Yes."

"All right, then. I've got a temperature of a hundred and two. And I feel like death. But I must go to-morrow. Do you mind coming up to my room and having a look at me? I want to know just what's wrong."

Upstairs in my room he examined me thoroughly.

"You're completely run down. You've still got a little jaundice on you. Nothing serious. But you'd better come back to hospital for a while."

"If I went on this trip to-morrow, just how much would it hurt me?"

"Hard to say. It might put you back three months. It might set you back a year."

"I'm going."

"No, you're not."

"Look, Michael. Supposing I was really fit, I'd be going back to the Desert to-morrow, and I might be killed the next day. By going on this trip, the worst that can happen to me is that I'll be ill for a year. Don't you see that I must take the risk? Remember you promised to forget that officially you're my doctor."

He thought for a while before saying, "If there wasn't a war on I'd stop you. As it is, will you promise me three things? You mustn't touch a drop of alcohol. You must rest as much as you possibly can. And you

must fly back to Cairo directly your mission is finished. I'll have a bed waiting for you at the hospital."

As the plane soared into the blue, cool air of the early morning, I stretched for my despatch-case, took out the folder, and tried to read my plan as if I were an indifferent Ambassador or General. However, the attempt at indifference failed after a few paragraphs, and I glanced through the plan critically, wishing that I had the power to express my thoughts with more precision.

If the Near East is to be handled by persuasion rather than by decree (I knew the words almost by heart), more tact and understanding, more genuine knowledge and real appreciation of the peoples concerned will be needed.

Even to-day certain sleek officials imagine they understand the mentality of a country by dining with a few rich merchants. Our services are sometimes isolated from any *real* contact with the Arab peoples, either by their parochial outlook and European customs, or by being tied to their office.

If we wait till the war ends to select our officials, we will only get men who doubt their ability to get a job in England.

Good junior officers who have been through the mill in the Western Desert, and who are keen to work in the Middle East after the war, should now be trained at a Centre with a view to staying as officials in the Middle East after the war.

At this Centre for three months they would learn the rudiments of Arabic, study Arab history, politics, religions, customs and geography. . . . Then they

would be sent out on detachments to see for themselves. . . .

The future British residents abroad must no longer seek to create an exclusive British island in a foreign land. The British tourist must be educated to understand that Wogs don't begin at Calais. . . .

The officers also meet Arabs (and, in Palestine, Jews) of their own age; men poor and rich, hard-working, balanced thinkers, hysterical idealists, profiteer politicians; so that they can gauge the direction, quality and strength of to-morrow's performers.

It is little good for our young men to-day to know only the leaders and the rich old men in Arab countries. Here to-day, gone to-morrow!

Arab education generally is tending to produce a young black-coated class which cannot be profitably absorbed. These urgent young men can see that their elders are seldom their betters, morally or mentally. And, because they have not had the chance, they cannot appreciate the technical difficulties of office. They yearn for freedom and an opportunity. This new class, which is increasing every day, has no pleasant contact with British officials. It is this class, unstable and bitter because it lacks responsibility, which will produce the revolutionaries of to-morrow if we continue to ignore its existence.

Yet some of these men who would be our enemies could be our friends. . . .

The spirit which prevails in the Centre will condition every man who passes through it. Quick bravery is not wanted for the leader in the Middle East, but patience and a steady courage, which can only be maintained over the long years ahead by strong faith in an ideal. . . .

To-day spare officers are scarce; and services are unwilling to release their trained officers for new jobs. Many good plans have been cramped or completely abandoned for lack of the necessary personnel.

Long and grim battles have raged in the Western Desert these last two years. Many officers and men have fought in every campaign. Some have been wounded and are being kept at the Base until their strength returns; others have been worn out by the strain, and have been sent back to rest, for a while at least. Some have taken staff jobs; others hang round their base depots doing odd jobs as the need of them arises. They are thick on the ground at Abbassia by day and at Shepheard's by night. (Men sent back to base as duds are here excluded.) But men who have fought well and long, especially if they are still young, are unlikely to remain content with the security and routine of what some, quite illogically, may feel to be a base existence. These get bored by jobs they find monotonous, by jobs for which they are not suited, and an office life in wartime is not a healthy one. Long before their strength returns, these men want to go back to their friends who are still fighting.

There lies this material in the unwholesome Delta.

The battle goes on; and every month will see yet another crop of young leaders sent back to Base because of wounds or bad health, or because they have lost their nerve for the time being. . . .

As many as possible of the officers required for this Centre should be selected from this potentially fine material.

The *relative* importance of various services can only be decided by the highest authorities; let them

remember that this Centre needs few men to be taken from the immediate war effort, yet it may well change the face of the Middle East. . . .

XXV

Altounyan met me at Lydda.

" You can stay with us in Jerusalem while we make a plan of campaign. Did you send a copy of your plan to Glubb? "

" No. Can we go and see him again? "

" I'll try and fix it for to-morrow. "

During the next week I sometimes wished that Altounyan's energy was exhaustible. However, it was his vitality which pushed our plan forward, and the magic of his sympathy which kept me going. In the whirlwind of activity there were two constant factors: the untiring skill of the bedu Elias, driver of Altounyan's staff car, and the gentle calm of Mrs. Altounyan, who produced food at whatever hour of the morning or night we returned from our conferences.

Glubb received me as a friend, and much of what he said he wrote me the next day in a letter to strengthen my hand with the Generals and civilian big-wigs.

(PERSONAL)

HEADQUARTERS,
ARAB LEGION,
8 Jan. '43.

MY DEAR MAUGHAM,

Thank you so much for sending me a copy of your note on the Arab Centre, in which I was very much

interested. I have always thought that one of the principal reasons for the vicissitudes which we have suffered in Arabia during the last twenty-four years has been the inferior quality of the British officials in Northern Arabia.

The reason why they have always been poor has been that they were formed into services from Occupied Enemy Territory Administrations which came into being during the first World War. The O.E.T.A.s formed during active operations were, of course, looked upon as "cushy" jobs, and thus the best and keenest young officers were ashamed to leave combatant units to join them. They were, therefore, filled by second-best, or even by definitely undesirable officers, whom their C.O.s seized the opportunity of getting rid of. It is to me heart-breaking to see the same process apparently going on again, not only in forming O.E.T.A.s, but in supplying political officers for Iraq, Syria, Persia and elsewhere.

I believe that you have realized the fact that the best young officers will not go to cushy jobs in wartime, and that the question is a spiritual one. It is not a question of picking up beachcombers who know Arabic. It does not matter if they know Arabic or anything else. If they are keen, they will soon learn. The point is that they must be first-class moral and spiritual material who join the Arab Centre, not to avoid doing their bit, but because they want to serve even more than they can with their units. In practice, of course, a good political officer is of far more value to the public service than a good regimental officer. A bad political officer may cause trouble which it will take brigades or divisions

to suppress. Still, the best young human nature is not rational—it is the stuff that dreams are made of—and in wartime they all want to get killed, even if they would be of more use in non-combatant jobs.

Your proposal to give your Arab Centre a military aspect and make it tough might do much to get over this hitherto insuperable obstacle, especially if it can be reinforced by propaganda, explaining that not only will the Centre cover para-military duties, but that it would involve isolation, danger and hardship, and is of much more importance to the United Nations than commanding a company or a squadron.

Unless something of this kind is done, I feel that the beachcombers and the second-best will get all these jobs now. When the war is over, and the really good material comes back from the battle, there are no vacancies. The beachcombers and second-best have by then become experts and are well dug in. And for the next thirty years British policy in the Middle East will be a failure. INDIVIDUALS ARE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN POLICIES IN THE EAST !

I agree also in the importance of having one Centre only. One of our chief handicaps in the past has been the small watertight compartments in which we work. Iraq, Transjordan, Palestine, Persian Gulf and so on, all have their own microscopic services, the members of which are often quite unknown to one another. To have one spirit inspiring everybody, and many of the people in different countries knowing one another, would be an inestimable advantage.

Another point which you do not mention is that of military officers now serving with Arab units. There must be large numbers of these—with the Libyan Arab Force, the TJFF, the Egyptian Army, the

Iraq Army, the Arab Legion, the Druze Regiment, Iraq Levies and so on. These officers come to these units knowing nothing. They may pick up a few words of Arabic, but few, if any of them, learn anything about Islam, Arab history or culture or the Arab mentality.

The result is that they can give simple orders, but they have no spiritual background in common with their men. As a result, they get no moral hold on them, and in a tight corner the men abandon them. Then people say that Arabs are no good as soldiers. This is not fair or true. I would certainly send most of the British officers of the Arab Legion to your Centre.

I seem to have written quite a treatise myself, but the subject is one of supreme importance and of intense interest. I hope that your Arab Centre will come into existence, and you can certainly count on me for all the support I can give you.

Yours sincerely,
J. B. GLUBB.

CAPTAIN MAUGHAM,
c/o HEADQUARTERS,
PALESTINE.

XXVI

When the porter at the King David asked me if I would mind sharing my taxi to the airport with a stranger, I gladly consented. My companion was a fat, dark Persian of middle-age, who spoke rather stilted French, and smelled faintly of cigars and eau-de-Cologne.

"I am meeting a plane," he said. "Are you meeting a plane, I wonder?"

"No, I'm flying to Baghdad."

He sighed. "Ah, how I envy you! To be young and in Baghdad." His hand trembled to his lips, and he blew a fluttering kiss into the air.

"Perhaps you will travel on to Teheran."

"Yes, I may do."

"You must certainly buy a carpet," he said, patting my knee. "Ah, without a doubt you must buy a carpet! They are so prettily made. The designs are so exquisite. The texture is so soft."

He sighed deeply. "But the way they are made is cruel, oh, terribly cruel. Children make them, you know—quite little boys. All day long the tiny creatures work in the carpet factories when they ought to be running about or splashing in the water or something of that nature. But this isn't what is cruel about it. You see, the pattern of our carpets is intricate, wonderfully intricate. Each thread has to be sewn correctly. That is tiring to the body. However, I am afraid their master carries a whip to correct that. Their master shows them the pattern and they never make a mistake. They begin at eight years old, you know."

He looked anxiously out of the window.

"I hope it will not be too windy to fly. I would be very annoyed if I had come out for nothing. Oh, yes, I was speaking of our factories. The work, you see, is also tiring to the eyes."

A waft of scent filled the cab as he drew out a silk handkerchief and wiped his face carefully.

"It tires the eyes," he repeated in a bored voice, "and by the time the boys are twelve or so, I am afraid their sight sometimes fails, and they have to be dis-

missed because they cannot tell one colour from another. In fact, some of them go quite blind. Now isn't that cruel?"

He yawned and covered his mouth with a flabby hand. "Excuse me. I was up very late last night, I am afraid. I expect you think I am too old for that kind of thing. I will tell you the truth. One is never too old. While there is life there is longing. While there is flesh there is loneliness. If you will forgive me, I think I will try to rest a little. But, my dear boy, let me give you a piece of advice. Buy yourself a really beautiful carpet in Baghdad."

XXVII

In Baghdad, I had already taken a room at the Shattal Arab, a ramshackle building which was formerly the Russian Embassy, when Nigel Clive invited me to stay at the house he shared with Freya Stark at Alwiyeh. I accepted gladly, and kept my room in the town for rest, if possible, during the afternoon.

I had not met Miss Stark, but I had read her books, and admired her clean, nervous prose and her fortitude.

"Freya's ill," Nigel said, "so we're to dine in her bedroom."

I had imagined a rather gaunt, tough traveller; I found, lying in a gaily decorated bedroom, a small, sprightly lady with thin, grey hair curling close to her head and dangling above her right eye. She was alert and observant, with her head on one side like a bird, inquiring with clear, piercing eyes beneath fine brows.

My picture of an austere traveller was shaken by an expensive row of pots and creams and lotions on her dressing-table.

"How are you feeling?" asked Nigel.

"Far better. I've just sent a signal to my boss which reads, 'It is all very well to be slow and decisive. But not slow and indecisive.' I feel far better now."

After dinner she looked at my papers.

"Commercial wives are the worst," she said, "they won't mix at all with the Arabs, and they're crashing snobs. I'm all for trying to get Glubb as Chief, but they probably can't spare him. If you want to talk to General Wilson about your idea, I can probably try to arrange it."

Later in the evening, spurred by a remark I cannot remember, she spoke of the intelligentsia of England before the war. "We have been betrayed by the intellectuals. When it was time to be wise they were clever. When it was time to fight, they were pacifists. When we needed spirit, they were flippant. Why should the common man follow them? Their characters and lives were such that he said, 'Well, if that's what it is to be clever, I'd rather stay as I am.'"

The next day I met Albert Haurani. He was shy and reserved, with a finely shaped, large head set on a slight, nervous body. His quiet voice and subdued manner were impressive. His gestures were so neat and quick, and his sensitive mind worked so precisely that I felt a clodhopper beside him.

"Young Arabs," he said, "feel that an intellectual

channel between them and the English does not exist. It is absolutely essential to have a few unofficial Englishmen in every important centre of Arab education, thought and political life, with the task of acting as consultants and helpers to whatever constructive movements are stirring the Arab youth. Their work will be difficult. They must so live and work that the Arab does not come to them for help, or refuse to come to them, because they are English, but because he knows that they can and will help him: in other words, because he needs them.

"The Arabs," he said, "are attached by habit and nostalgia, if not by conviction, to their traditional way of life. But Western goods and Western ideas are threatening to destroy the principles on which the old loyalty was based. The Arabs are being forced more and more to conform to the ways of a Western community, which they do not regard as their own. The Arabs are in danger of becoming Levantines, men forced to live in two worlds, to neither of which they belong. They are humiliated because they feel that the West despises them. Yet they cannot help their suspicion that in some ways the West is right to despise them. This makes them dangerously sensitive, and quick to take offence.

"I believe that Britain can only obtain stable and friendly governments in the Arab countries if she can persuade the educated youth to seek and value her help in solving the internal problems of their nation."

Altounyan had given me a letter to Tariq Al Askari, son of Jaffar Pasha. He showed me the *souks* of Baghdad, the delicate workers in filigree, the sooty-

faced silversmiths creating candelabras, candlesticks and cake-stands in the image of Birmingham, the pallid, skinny boys sweating in the leather shops, gaudy pictures of palm trees and the Tigris in Amara work, the exquisitely shimmering brocades.

Then he led me to the mosques and domes and minarets beside the brownly flowing Tigris. We talked of government.

“How could anyone expect the Iraq government to be stable before the war,” he asked, “when Germany was intriguing with us, Persia was being corrupted, and England was hoping the storm-clouds would blow away? Our young men are violently bitter because they lack the experience of office. But when they’re given a job they won’t attend to the ordinary routine, and so they don’t know the essential mechanics of government.”

I asked him about the “Brotherhood of Freedom,” which Freya Stark had started, to spread the idea of democracy. He was doubtful how deeply it could reach.

“I’m a farmer,” he said. “Do I care whether the government calls itself Nazi or Democratic so long as I get security and good machinery for my crops?”

A tiny spurt of rage touched his voice, and his dark eyes glared away from me.

“You’ll never explain the idea of Democracy to workmen and labourers,” he said. “They don’t begin to know what’s happening in Europe. But they do know whether they’ve got enough to eat or not. And generally they’ve not.”

Then he smiled at me, and, taking my arm affectionately, he led me into his house for tea. Hanging in a place of honour in the room was a photograph of the

Cairo Conference of 1921. He pointed out to me his father, who was wearing a sun-helmet and full uniform, and looked far bigger than the rest, as if his photograph had been added later. It was amusing to spot Churchill looking debonair, almost coy, and Sinclair's face peering anxiously from the back row, and T. E. Lawrence, shy and boyish, looking in his high stiff collar like a junior clerk who had walked in by mistake.

Later we strolled through the villages of poor mud houses beside the Tigris.

"They don't build with anything better than mud because, with the floods, it isn't worth while."

The palm trees were silhouetted against the vast glow of the setting sun, like cardboard imitations against an orange cyclorama. We stood in silence by the river. Presently he said, "We'll always be friends now, won't we?"

As I awoke I remembered I was to see the Commander-in-Chief at ten o'clock, so I nervously polished my buttons and Sam Browne belt.

My taxi moved slowly because the narrow streets were slippery with rain. By the bridge a horse slipped and fell. A crowd gathered quickly. One man pulled at its tail while a policeman kicked its stomach quickly. The horse plunged to its feet, slithering hopelessly, and moved forward in a frantic jerk. With a shudder I remembered the boy on the Damascus bridge.

General Wilson received me kindly and patiently. He was a large man, large in size and generosity and in understanding of human things.

"You can report," he said, "that I would play in with the idea of sending all my officers to find out those

interested, and I would send them to the Centre, and later I would send them out on detachments."

Tariq called for me in his car and drove me quickly to the Iraq House of Parliament where, in the pleasant chamber with cream walls and fittings of light brown wood, the Prime Minister, with sweat trickling down his face, declared war against the Axis, in a quiet, hesitant voice before a crowded audience, several large arc lamps, and a movie camera which focused slowly in turn on each speaker so that one almost expected a little man to appear with a pair of wooden clappers.

Then I drove to the British Embassy. I found a young official in the ante-room who looked out sadly from the window to the brown expanse of the Tigris flowing outside. The river was so wide that the mud huts on the far banks seemed miles away.

"By so much," he said sadly, "are we separated from the Arabs."

Cornwallis had read my notes. He greeted me cheerfully. "I will discuss the matter with Glubb. I will write to Clayton. The scheme has my blessing."

My little mission in Baghdad was finished, so I decided to leave for Damascus at once.

XXVIII

I arrived in Damascus on the morning of the funeral of Sheikh Tageddine, the late President of Syria. All British and French officers were ordered to attend.

Watched suspiciously by the mourners, we marched round the coffin which lay in the House of Parliament. We were ushered out by another door into the street,

where we had to push our way through the crowd back to the place from which we had started. The paid mourners were giving good value for money. Women howled and shrieked from the upper windows. I saw one girl stop yelling for a moment in order to wink at a friend in the street below, and then resume her bellowing all the more frantically. The crowds were growing larger. A squadron of Circassian troops, in black tunics and white cloaks, walked past on their restless horses, led by a fiercely moustached Colonel who twirled his sabre defiantly. The air was perfectly still. Little cumulus clouds were poised in a bright, blue sky. Presently an R.A.F. plane wheeled overhead as the Fighting French flags were carried past.

The weight of mourners increased, and gradually, to their bewilderment, the distinguished Diplomats and Generals standing on the steps of the House of Parliament, compelled by inexorable pressure from behind, were pushed down the steps into the streets and into the midst of the jostling crowds. I caught one glimpse of General Collet squeezed cheek by jowl with the Armenian patriarch, who had a large black beard. The mourners renewed their howling, and I crept away.

That evening I saw General Spears, who warned me of various difficulties I had overlooked; the next day I drove to Beirut, and the next morning I flew back to Cairo where I went straight to hospital. Michael gave instructions to the night nurse to wait until I had finished and sealed my report before giving me an injection and a dose of luminol. I remember lying back, relaxed at last, in my safe white bed. The drone of the plane's engine was still in my ears, and my head ached with persistent, rhythmic thuds, but in my heart was peace, and I thought of a ship, after the buffets and

atterings of a long voyage, moving quietly across the bar into a moonlit, tranquil harbour; and I listened to the water lapping against the wooden spars of the jetty until presently I fell asleep.

XXIX

I was quite ill for three weeks, and Dick, who was now almost normal, was put in to share my room. Fred visited us frequently; so did Branch from the ward next door, who was suffering from having been kept in hospital too long, as much as from anything else.

“‘Hospitalization,’ it’s called,” he said. “In other words, corridors and sisters send one cuckoo.”

We lived in a hygienic, white honeycomb, devoid of equality. We invented odd characters which became more real to us than our neighbours. Branch re-created the brilliant young diplomat, St. John Éclaire. I created from the telephone slot-machine at the end of the corridor, which only responded when slapped vigorously, the character of a Hungarian tart called Schlottajch.

One morning Fred disturbed the hospital routine by deciding, just before the Brigadier’s inspection, that he wished to wash all his clothes. He went furtively into a corner, took them all off, washed them, and put them carefully out to dry, one on each of the radiators which spanned the hospital corridor. The hubbub was subsiding when my friend John Watson stole like a fugitive into my room. Visitors were not allowed until afternoon. I knew this meant some development in my plan, which he had helped me to draft.

“Churchill is back from the Adana conference,” he

said. "He wants to see you at four o'clock this afternoon."

"Go on," I said. "I suppose Hitler wants to see me afterwards."

"It's true. Do you think you'll be allowed out?"

"I'll get out somehow."

But Michael was out for the day. At last I approached the Sister.

"Can I possibly go out for an hour this afternoon?"

"Certainly not."

"It's awfully important."

"I'm sorry, Captain Maughan. But that's quite impossible."

"If I tell you why, do you promise to keep it to yourself?"

"Yes."

"I've got to see Churchill. He's at the Embassy. At four o'clock."

She looked at me for a moment. Then she said, "All right. So long as you're only out an hour."

I felt sick and feeble as I got out of my taxi and walked into the Embassy. The ante-room was so full of generals that I recoiled and would have tried to escape if I had not been rescued and led into another office where the Prime Minister's staff sat about in attitudes of exhaustion.

The double doors at the end of the room swung open and disclosed Churchill in a boiler suit. He was radiant with vitality.

"Whiskies and sodas for all," he said, and disappeared within.

Suffragis sprang up from nowhere with drinks, and I

was offered one which I accepted, feeling that at least it could not make me feel any iller. It did not: it went to my head so that I felt almost capable of conversation with Churchill. The doors swung open again, and I was brought up to him.

"How are you? Come into the next room."

He beckoned me into a large armchair, and offered me a drink and a cigar.

"Well," he said, leaning back, "this is a far cry from Chartwell. And what have you been doing?"

I thought of the gaggle of generals waiting in the anteroom, and explained my plan in a few words.

"I don't want any fit men taken away for this," he said later.

"They won't be, sir."

"Very well."

I rose quickly to leave, but he wandered with me to the door with his arm on my shoulder.

"If they want to invalid you home you must let them."

"I don't want to go. There's nothing for me there."

"You must let them."

As I walked happily along the corridor which led to my room I met the Sister.

"Well, at least you kept your word," she said.

"Of course I did."

"But next time you want to spend an afternoon with your girl-friend," she said, "just tell me outright, and don't tell fibs to make an excuse. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sister," I said.

XXX

I was kept several weeks longer in hospital. Then I was ordered a month's rest and down-graded permanently by a medical board. While I was spending a few delicious days in Alexandria I heard from England that I was wanted in London for a job concerned with tanks. "I must stick to my present line of business," I answered. However, the news made me anxious to report to Clayton.

The plan was progressing slowly but steadily, so I was sent to Palestine to find a site for the Centre once it had been approved by the bureaucrats.

"Glubb might have some useful suggestions," said Clayton. So once more I journeyed to Amman.

Glubb received me warmly, and that evening he said in his quiet voice, "I have a suggestion to make. We have still got matters to discuss. And to-morrow I am leaving for a trip to Kaf, across the frontier into Saudi Arabia. Would you like to come with me?"

Shortly after noon the next day, we set off across the desert in his staff car, followed by an escort of Arabs from the Legion, bristling with rifles and cross-sashed with bandoliers, who followed in two open trucks.

"One year," said Glubb, "the Emir Abdul Azziz el Sidari, appointed by Ibn Saud to control the frontier, visits me; the next year I visit him. This year it's my turn. Several years ago, relations between Transjordan and Saudi Arabia were not so friendly as now. The first step to friendship was when I visited the Emir in a tent pitched exactly on the frontier so that neither of us should lose face.

'But now,' he said, 'our relations are friendly, & the Emir will receive us in a fortress he has built near distance beyond the frontier. What is more, I fancy I can prophesy that we shall sit in European style chairs, because you see the Emir lives in the middle of a great desert, and when he entertains me he is kind enough to send for extra provisions from the nearest town, which is Amman. Two days ago I saw a lorry trundling its way back from Amman towards Kaf, laden with a suite of blue plush armchairs, so I fancy we'll be received in European style. You'll also be glad to hear he's bought lots of nuts and goodies.'

Presently we drew near an Arab Legion outpost set on a prominent hill, with its towers and battlements rising abruptly from the desert, like a toy fort on a messy tablecloth. The swarthy guards turned out and Ibb walked across to inspect each warrior in his skin skirt which reached to the ground like a long valkyrie greatcoat. I stayed by the car watching. The troopers presented arms in fine military fashion, they stood arms with splendid precision; then on the command "*Insaraf!*" they slapped the butts of their revolvers like one man. "They're as smart as guardsmen," I thought. "And now they'll walk off parade quick time." But directly they'd been dismissed they rushed towards Glubb and covered his hands with kisses. He was their friend and the fact that he was their Commander-in-Chief made no difference. I wanted a word with him, so we stayed to take tea in the toy fort.

I was glad to be in the Desert again, perhaps because those great clean spaces one can allocate to the works than their due proportion. We talked of the future of Arabia and sometimes of the future of the world.

"It is this modern haste," he said, "which is making us incapable of understanding. The tendency is to ask for 'facts'—how to decide the future of the world in fourteen points on half a sheet of paper, and there we are. The evolution of humanity is on half a sheet of paper, which we can glance at and initial before looking at the next file in our tray.

"Unfortunately, government isn't as simple as that. Every human being is different from every other. And we have five hundred millions of them on our hands. Quiet thought, a scientific study of history and psychology, and love and faith in humanity—all these are required before we in Britain can form correct opinions on how to handle so vast an Empire. Progress can only be made by continual experiment, by self-examination and by readjustment.

"When we look back at human institutions six thousand years ago, we find them not so very different to our own. There is undoubtedly progress, but it is a progress reckoned in terms of centuries, if not millennia. Viewed from this angle, our idea that we can bring in a new age in an American hustle is insufferably supercilious.

"Men far more highly placed than I am out here agree as to the necessity of many changes in policy and administration in the Middle East. But they kill every proposal in the end by saying: 'I'm sure you're quite right, but it would be impossible to get through Parliament. . . . No politician could get up and advocate that in the House. . . . The British press would raise an outcry. . . . The British public would not stand for it. . . . We must consider public opinion in the U.S.A. . . .'

"It seems," he said with a sigh, "that we often

now the right thing to do, but fear to do it because the British public have not realized that it is the right thing. We are obliged to do the wrong thing because the British public is too ignorant to approve the correct action.

“Surely the answer is not to do the wrong thing in order to gain the mistaken support of the public, but to help the public find out the true facts, and thus be in position to support the correct course. This may take longer, but it is the only way to get the right answer permanently.

“I hope the men from your Centre, when they go back, will tell the public at home the truth.”

At the frontier we were greeted by an envoy from the Emir, and paused to take coffee in a long, black tent. The bedouin coffee is bitter, fragrant and refreshing; he drinks it from small, shallow cups—only a little at a time. Presently we drove away, following the envoy in the Emir's Ford limousine.

Seven bearded ruffians, marshalled into a ragged line outside the sandstone fortress, presented arms as we approached Kaf in the evening. The Emir received us courteously, and gracefully ushered us into a long, low-ceilinged room, richly strewn with beautiful carpets. He was a trim, dapper man with a neat black beard, dressed in spotless robes. We sat around on the carpets, leaning our elbows on thick cushions. Retainers came bearing silver bowls and pitchers of hot water to wash the grit from our hands after the dust of the journey; first they stood before each of us in turn, bearing an incense-burner to cleanse our nostrils from the smell of travelling; then came retainers and sprinkled soft

lotions of a beautiful perfume on our palms. Presently they brought us coffee; then sweet fragrant tea, and soon more coffee, while conversation proceeded smoothly between the Emir and Glubb, watched happily by all their retainers seated on the floor beside us, until we rose to eat. On the floor of another room lay our feast: a fine sheep roast whole and richly stuffed, lying in state on a great mound of rice and surrounded by dishes of salads, pastries, sweetmeats, nuts, leban and other dishes brought across the desert. We all sat round on our haunches and ate only with our right hand, for the left hand is unclean, being reserved for various functions. Because of my appalling ignorance of anatomy and cooking, I tore off unusual pieces of meat, but they tasted excellent, and my host, determined that after Glubb I should have the next best, now and then would tear off a particularly succulent piece of meat and set it in front of me.

When we stood up together at the end of the meal, retainers brought us bowls to wash our hands, and we were led by the hospitable Emir to another room in which we found the blue plush armchairs in all their suburban splendour. Again we were brought fine incense to smell, and fragrant lotions for our hands, bitter coffee, then sweet tea, followed by more bitter coffee, and again sweet tea, until it was time to retire for the night. In the first room we had visited, thick quilts had been strewn on top of the carpets to make two beds for Glubb and myself. It was then, in secret, that I lit my first cigarette since entering the house. Our host, being a Wahhabbi, does not smoke.

The next morning our Arab retainers called us soon

ter dawn with little glasses of tea and hot water in autiful bowls for shaving. Glubb was already awake d reading the Bible. After we had dressed and aved, we adjourned to the room of the blue plush mchairs, and were greeted by our host. Then we oved into a large room we had not previously visited. i its floor lay spread the loveliest breakfast I have er seen: fresh dates and thick cream, omelettes, eetmeats, leban, sweet pastry balls, fresh hot sheeps' lk and fresh bread.

At eleven we went for a drive round the near villages, pping at each to take coffee. This part of the desert dominated by short, flat-topped escarpments, black ics of a volcanic age, worn flat by the winds of turries.

The Emir welcomed us on our return to his fortress, d we climbed upstairs, followed by our escort, to yet other room covered with our farewell meal: six sheep st whole on great mounds of rice, encircled by inmerable dishes. This time I selected my meat with re. Replete we rose, washed our hands, took coffee, d quietly bade the Emir farewell.

That morning, in March, it had rained strongly, and e wadis were swollen. Our cars splashed slowly ng for two hours until we reached a wadi which ked almost impassable. Undaunted, our bedouin ver drove straight into the shallow river. I began take off my shoes and stockings, for I was certain we uld stick. Glubb continued talking about Arabia. e engine stopped; but we still moved forward, for r Arab escort in the trucks behind had girt up their as and, thigh deep in the water, were straining be d the car.

Without hesitation, Glubb, in his best uniform, flung

open the door of the car and leaped into the stream. And we joined the struggling mass of skinny men, floundering in the water.

As with a shout of triumph we pushed the car on to firm ground, rain began to fall in slow, heavy drops, which slithered in streaks down our sandy thighs and turned the ground by the river into slimy mud, so that even the supple Arabs began to slip and fall to the joy of their comrades. Now we gathered behind the open truck to rush it across the river with the engine roaring in bottom gear, but half-way across the back wheels began to spin round and sink deep into the slime, the engine stopped, and, with a squelch, the truck settled down into the mud. The rain fell with a loud patterning noise. It was bitterly cold. We took out the iron trays from the back of the truck and began the slow labour of moving the car forward foot by foot, hour by hour.

The Arabs toiled merrily, straining their sinews vigorously against the truck, when Glubb in a quiet voice gave the order for a fresh effort, and frolicked joyously together while we considered the next move. When they were not heaving under the truck, the Arabs now walked in pairs, hand in hand, to avoid falling. At last the truck moved with a roaring jerk, hesitated for an instant while we strained frantically, and then lurched forward, spattering us anew with mud, and churned onwards on to firm ground.

As we slithered after it, an Arab took my hand and held it firmly for support. When we reached the solid earth he still gripped my hand. He smiled into my eyes.

“Nice,” he said, and laughed and turned away.

XXXI

I was staying in John Adam Watson's flat opposite the Embassy. It was Sunday morning, and I decided to stroll slowly in the pleasant sunshine by the Nile. When I returned to the flat I felt dizzy, so I took my temperature. It was 104°. I thought the thermometer must have broken, and I shook it down to 96° and tried again. It was still 104°. When John returned from the Embassy I told him I intended to move to the Continental Hotel.

"But why in heaven's name don't you go to hospital?"

"Now that Michael Kremer has gone back to England, there's not much point. Anyhow, at this stage I must have a phone by my bed. I'll get one at the Continental."

"They take the coffins out by night, so I'm told," John said. "However, it's your funeral."

"That's right."

I drove in a taxi round the Moslem shops which were open, and bought two pairs of pyjamas and the works of Wilde and of Wodehouse. Then I undressed shakily in my small bedroom in the Continental, and awaited the arrival of John's Greek doctor.

"Your sinus is altogether infected," he said. "You are altogether poisoned. You must take M. and B."

I lay sweating in the close heat of night.

"You must give me some dope or something," I said the next morning.

He wrote out a prescription neatly in violet ink.

"You can take two of these each hour."

Our memory, in league with Nature's tricks to ensure the survival of the human race, cheats us by registering the flowers, not the pain of illness. But I know that there is a world into which I am forced by fierce pain. Each time I can recognize its shape.

During the long hours when I could not read, the vision of my enemy tormented me. I have spoken of my friends and of kindly people, but I have been careful to omit my enemy, not only for fear of libel or boredom, but because really he was undefinable. Flesh and blood I can never hate for long. But my enemy was not of flesh, rather he was an influence, seldom visible, creeping like a poisonous vapour into the courses of my plan. Sometimes I could see the shine of his trail: a movement order would be abruptly refused, a friend would be translated to another command without reason, a letter would fail to reach its destination, or the voice in my ear would grow faint as the line was tapped. Sometimes I saw him face to face in his various guises. He was frequently a Major, holding a cushy job in the Base Sub Area Office, conscious of his rank and safety, strictly punctilious, effusive to the Senior Officers, vicious with his subalterns and clerks. The pencil twisted in his pale, mean hands as he enforced the last letter of each regulation and ignored their intention. His shifty, small eyes flicked cautiously about his little province, searching for a new method of avoiding work, glittering at the opportunity of affixing blame, like a dart, into his victim, or gleaming in anticipation of a safe spot of lust on the cheap, which would make a good story afterwards to tell the Colonel.

Once he appeared in the form of a Brigadier, with a fat scarlet neck which clashed with the pink of his tabs.

Before the war he was a prosperous banker, with various connections, mainly sexual, with the stage. He had risen to the eminence of red tabs by his wits and by his success in bluffing Generals in the Regular Army that he "knew what Tommy wanted." "You've got to study Tommy Atkins' psychology," he would say. "What he wants on leave is dirty songs first and clean women afterwards. None of this highbrow nonsense. There's only one Arab thing *he* cares about. As for the officers, the sooner they can forget about the Arabs, the better they're pleased. They don't care two hoots if they're in Egypt or Iraq so long as they've got a decent Mess. You chaps who have the impertinence to say we ought to try and get on with the Arabs, seem to forget that we're White Men and they're first wogs. They ought to make the effort to get on with us."

Once, my enemy was in the guise of a civil servant, sent, all cool, from Whitehall. Always he sat discreetly behind a large desk on a high chair.

"I don't know what the Treasury will say," he said. Of course the Minister of State should have been consulted before you saw Churchill. That was irregular. Most irregular."

His well-manicured hands were clasped primly together, his thin lips were closed in a narrow line. After forty years' service in Whitehall he knew the channels and courses of bureaucracy better than the arts of his own body.

"We must discover the correct procedure. We must not be hasty. We might sub-committee it here first, before we send it to the Treasury. We should, perhaps, consider that course of action. I will bring up the latter for discussion at the next meeting of the main

committee which meets, let me see, yes, it meets the last Friday in every month. That is to say in three weeks' time."

XXXII

Somehow I mistrusted the look of the official envelope, and opened it nervously. It was an order from the Royal Armoured Corps, which was still my parent unit, though I had been adopted by the Intelligence Centre for almost a year. The order posted me back to England. I was to report, in five days' time, to a transit camp at Suez.

I telephoned to Clayton's office. He had suggested that I should return to London by plane to deal with my plan, which seemed to have got stuck in Whitehall, and to recuperate in the cool air. My only hope now was that the order sending me on a mission to London would cancel the order posting me back to the United Kingdom to work on tanks. But the huge organization of the Army was like a clumsy giant whose left hand spasmodically removed what his right hand wished to grasp. Sometimes it was like a prehistoric monster whose reactions were so slow that you could cut off the tip of its tail without the creature knowing for half an hour.

A third and dangerous alternative was that, even if I could escape the claws of the Royal Armoured Corps, I might get enmeshed in the cogs of the Medical Corps, which would "invalid" me back to England by way of the hospitals of South Africa. This process might take a year.

One sultry afternoon, while I lay in my darkened room listening to the blaring of motor-horns in the crowded streets, there was a gentle tap at the door, and Glubb appeared. He had flown down to Cairo for a day's conference, but he stayed talking with me for two hours. After he left I realized that even if I suffered a little defeat in my plan, I was only one of hundreds of workers in this tawny field who toiled to lessen the barrier between peoples, if only by an inch, though they knew that the winds of indifference would silt up the sand against the barrier, and all trace of their labours would be removed. Each of us felt he was all alone. "But one day," Altounyan said, "the lone voices crying in the wilderness will awake to find themselves shouting in a crowd."

XXXIII

can almost grin now when I think how inevitable it was that the question of my flying back to England should have been referred to the Civil Servant. All day waited in suspense. That evening I was told what he had said.

"I do not want Maugham to fly back to England. In no account is this to occur. The three months' voyage round the Cape will do him good. It will cool him down a bit."

Thus in the summer of 1943 I was put on a slow ship which twice crossed the Equator on the long voyage

home, which was insufficiently cool to prevent several victims of the tropics being sewn up in green canvas bags, weighted down with stones, and slipped out from a lower deck to fall with a little splash into the smooth sea.

XXXIV

In London I reported at the various Ministries and Offices concerned with my plan, to functionaries who seemed more interested in gossip than action. However, an invitation to Chequers for the week-end gave me the chance to tell my story.

“On the occasions,” said Churchill, “when I consider the obstructions of bureaucracy, I sometimes stand amazed that ever a single fighting man reaches the front with a rifle and ammunition at the right place and time.”

I still had not realized my weakness. But on Sunday at Chequers I collapsed, to my intense embarrassment. Details of illness either bore one or make one sick, so I will dismiss two years in a few lines relevant to my story.

Now that I was in familiar surroundings I discovered complete gaps in my memory. Often one piece of the jig-saw brought back the whole pattern of events. During the second act of a play, for instance, the scene appeared curiously familiar. Then I felt a curious stirring in my head, and a rapid excitement as my memory cut into the present, and I remembered the

night when I had seen the play before and the weeks encircling that night which had previously been a blank.

I thought it would be silly to make obvious blank passages in writing this story, so I have disguised them, partly with the aid of Harriet Martineau.

My consciousness was also uncertain. I would be walking with a friend before dinner when a curtain would come down over my mind like a shutter, and I would remember nothing until it lifted, perhaps as I was saying good-bye, perhaps when I awoke in bed the next morning. The friend would have noticed nothing unusual. Only my conscious memory of what happened was suspended during the period. These black-outs worried me, and for a time I was afraid I was going mad, so I carried in my breast pocket an envelope with "Please Open" marked on it. This contained instructions that if I lost consciousness I should be taken to Michael Kremer who was now at the Hospital for Head Injuries at Oxford.

I was invalidated out of the Army with a pension "based on fifty per cent disability," and ordered to rest. Michael always promised me that I would not go mad. However, I only half believed him.

"If things get too bad," he said, "I can put you out completely for a month, and you'll awake rosy and relaxed at the end of it."

The prospect of a month's oblivion cheered me. But it was not necessary, for I slowly recovered.

Meanwhile my plan was adopted, and the Middle East Centre of Arab Studies was started, in a small way, exactly two years too late.

BOOK TWO

“If I have restored to the East some self-respect, a goal, ideals; if I have made the standard of rule of white over red more exigent, I have fitted those peoples in a degree for the new commonwealth in which the dominant races will forget their brute achievements, and white and red and yellow and brown and black will stand up together without side-glances in the service of the world.”

T. E. LAWRENCE.

This will be the last mention of ill-health or derangement. I knew that Dick, restored in mind and body, was now an instructor at Sandhurst. But there was no news of Fred. One day I answered the phone and heard his voice.

“Hullo, Robin. Hullo. It’s Fred. Have a drink? I’m at the Berkeley. You must come.”

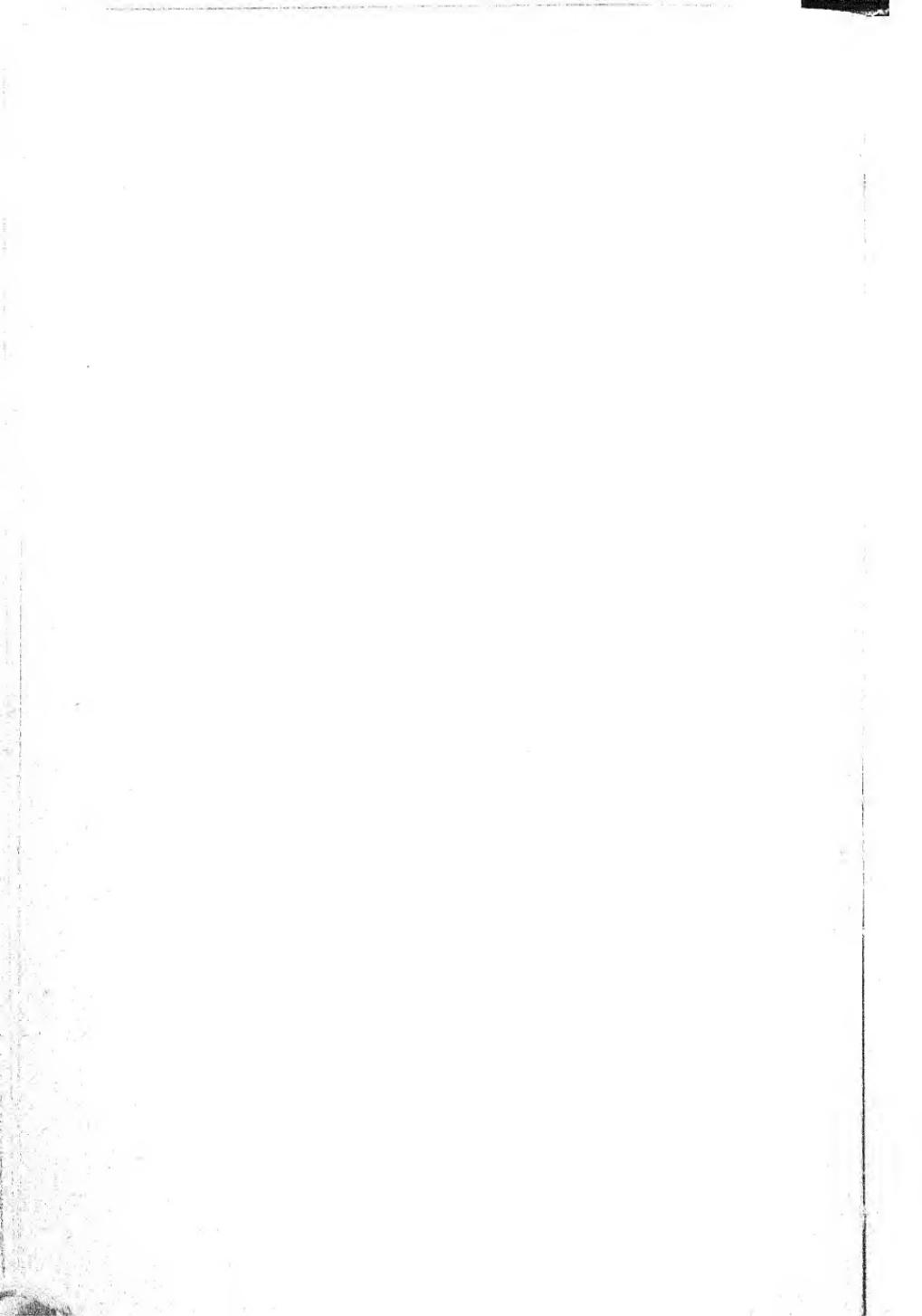
So I went. I found him in good spirits and in good mind, standing stiffly erect in a corner of the bar.

“Have a drink now. You must stay to dinner. This is my big night in London. I’ve asked all my friends to meet me here and dine. We shall be a terrific party. I say, ought I to order a table?”

“How many shall we be?”

He stared at me with his blazing blue eye. His brow wrinkled as he considered my question.

“Seventy-eight,” said Fred.



I

I reckoned I had failed in my little effort because I cared overmuch for the present: I lacked proportion in judgment. Therefore I spent the next three years in earning about Arab things and in making dispositions for a long project, so distant that I could not tell its precise shape or determine if it had any value at all. I only knew certainly that I would find no satisfaction until I returned to the Arab lands again.

The journey was punctuated with breakfasts, generous and starchy at Bournemouth in the morning, neagre at Marseilles in the afternoon, sumptuous and greasy at Malta in the middle of the night. I felt drowsy, but I was so happy I could not sleep. I settled the rugs about my feet, pulled out a little diary from my pocket, and turned the leaves until I found "12 WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER," and I wrote "LUKA 1 a.m. airborne." Then I added, "Next stop Libya." The words rolled round in my mind to the rhythm of the drone of the plane, while I remembered the long voyage in convoy round the Cape the other time I had left England to reach Libya in August, 1941. Sleepily I pondered on the difference between then and now.

The main difference, I decided, was that to-day I was a civilian travelling of my own free will. Five years ago I had been under command. Yet then I had wanted to reach Libya. There was, I concluded, a difference between doing what you wanted because you thus decided and doing what you wanted because

another had thus commanded. Last time I was part of a unit of force which the Commander-in-Chief had instructed should proceed to Libya. This time I had in my pocket a letter from General Paget which said, "I do hope you will come out to the Middle East as an observer."

I leant back drowsily in my chair and chuckled. Perhaps last time my troop should have been invited. I could picture the scene outside our troop tent on the desolate plains near Warminster. I suppose I would have told Buck, my troop sergeant, first.

"Look here. Number One troop, A Squadron, has had an invitation from the Commander-in-Chief." (What was his name then? I cannot even remember.)

"Oh, yes, sir," Buck would reply, quite calmly, for after two years of Army training in England nothing could surprise him.

"He wants us to go out to Libya to fight against Rommel."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"If we decide to go he'd like us to leave in six days' time."

"In rather a hurry, isn't he, sir?"

"Sounds like it."

"Of course we'll have to put it to the troop first."

"Of course."

So Buck and I would walk into the damp-smelling tent.

"Sit down. You can smoke if you like. I've got some news. We've had an invitation from the Commander-in-Chief. This is what he says: 'I do hope you will come out to the Middle East as a troop, complete with your tanks, to fight against Rommel.' It's up to us to decide. Well, what shall we do?"

And I think I know the final decision.

"We'll go. After all, it can't be worse than training in England, muck it."

At last I could see the lights of the landing-strip at El Adem. The plane bumped gently to rest. I walked from the Mess, where yet another breakfast awaited us, and strolled away from the aerodrome, south towards the open. The darkness was lifting. Soon I would see the first crimson threads of dawn streak the greyness of the sky to the East. Then I sniffed the dry, clean air which had swept freely across a thousand miles of desert, and I was glad to be out in those lands again.

Presently I walked into the Mess. I was thinking of the tank battles round El Adem and of those who had lied in the sands, of the love and danger, and my mind was in the past, when suddenly I started. There were Germans close. I could hear their voices. I whipped round. Two blond German boys were talking to each other softly as they cleaned the next table for breakfast. One saw me staring at him and walked quickly towards me.

"Can I bring you something, sir?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I am a waiter."

I spoke in German.

"How long have you been here?"

"One and a half years. Before that I was in the Afrika Corps. Now I am a prisoner and work on this aerodrome."

"Where do you come from?"

"Hamburg."

"How old are you?"

“Twenty.”

A thick mop of corn-coloured hair fell about his head, and his features were rather coarse and floppy. He looked like a pleasant farmer’s boy in the Tyrol, shy and quite gentle.

“What were you in?”

“Panzer division.”

“Were you in a tank?”

“Yes.”

“Nasty, smelly things, aren’t they?”

“Yes.”

“Are you all right here?”

“Oh, yes.”

“I mean, do they treat you all right?”

“Oh, yes. But I wish I could go back to Germany. I have not heard anything of my family. I would like to go back to Germany.”

“I’m afraid it’s pretty grim there nowadays.”

“Yes. But it is my country.”

The sky was dappled with crimson and gold as the plane soared away from El Adem on the last lap to Cairo. I looked down at the desert where we fought. The broken tanks and trucks had been cleared away for scrap iron, and there were few traces of our fighting except the trenches and the graves. I remembered how nearly we were defeated. How nearly I might have waited on the German boy and served him. And I wondered if he would have been kind to me.

II

A swarthy man in a brown suit was sitting next to me at the bar of the Continental Hotel in Cairo, and he offered me a drink.

"You don't mind my addressing you?"

"Heavens, no," I said.

"My friend will be late. And I must wait for half an hour."

He was about twenty-five years old, with heavy, broad shoulders and a wide mouth which seemed set in perpetual smile. He was distinctly feline, I decided; and when he leant across me to reach for a match I smelled for an instant the hot, musky smell of tigers at the zoo. Black hair curled thickly on the back of his strong fingers.

"I am a Palestinian Jew, you should know," he said later. "Does that disturb you?"

"Not at all."

"But you are English, and the English hate us."

"Nonsense," I said. "Have another drink."

He leant forward and put his arm round my neck before I could recoil. His breath stank of brandy.

"I will tell you something else," he said in a low voice. "We Jews hate the English."

I moved away discreetly from his reach.

"We hate them," he said. As I looked at his eyes I realized what I suppose I should have noticed long before. He was drunk.

"But we hate the Arabs more. Come closer and I will tell you something. But you must promise not to tell anyone."

“ I don’t even know your name.”

“ You could find out. You could ask people here who know me, couldn’t you? Never mind. I don’t care. What proof have you got? I will tell you. My father has a factory between Tel Aviv and Tulkarm. We employ only Jews. Before the war the Arabs used to raid us. There was a hill overlooking the factory. They would lie on this hill and fire at our men. One evening they killed one of our men. They killed a Jew.”

He drained his glass, and turned round on the bar stool so that he faced me.

“ That night in the darkness I went up with one of our foremen who handled the explosives we used for blasting at our works, and together we mined every yard of that hill. We worked until just before dawn when we covered up all trace of our work. But we had concealed a wire from the hillside to the shed which was my office. Each evening I sat in my office by the switch, waiting, waiting for the Arabs to come back.”

His hands were stuck deep into the pockets of his trousers, and he was breathing heavily.

“ Each evening I waited. Then one night the Arabs came back. They began firing at our men. But still I waited. I waited until from the flashes I could see there were many of them on the hill. Then I pressed the switch. There was a great flash and a loud explosion. The whole hillside crumbled into the valley. I walked out. The explosion had been successful. No Arab body was left whole. I would find the arm of a man here and a leg there. I collected all the remains I could find.”

He paused. His eyes were glittering. Then he finished his story in a voice hoarse with triumph.

"An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," he id.

III

Almost every man who served in the Middle East has taken an interest in the problem of Palestine. Almost every writer who has sniffed the Levant has given his views about it. During the last thirty years, experts have made frequent reports, and Arabs and Jews have rotested with words and gunpowder before a worldwide gallery. Millions of impassioned phrases have boured from a thousand quivering pens. Good-natured men in the West have sacrificed time and money to hurl themselves into the cause of either side with the abandon of converts. Political campaigns in Western countries have been influenced by events in an Eastern country the size of Wales. And the more the actors rotest, and the more the partisans in the gallery cheer, the less likely it becomes that the problem will be settled justly. For the problem of Palestine is distorted because it is generally argued in terms either of emotion or of political or strategic expediency.

The minds of men are rightly filled with horror at the fate of European Jewry. But in the West, in addition to the horror, there is a sense of guilt. Britain and America could have done more to help the Jews than they have done. And anti-Semitism is always lurking. Now and then it erupts in the East End of London or in New York. But it simmers in both countries, though it is more obvious in the States where Jews are refused admittance to various hotels and clubs. The

rich Jew is marked; the rich Gentile is unnoticed. Fascism showed how easy it was to stir up envy and hatred of the Jews. Smug racial discrimination in the West shows how easy it is to keep resentment simmering.

The two democracies regard the fate of Jews in Europe with horror mixed with guilt. The Zionists regard starving Jews in Europe as we would regard starving Britons in Europe who were not allowed admittance into England. The Arabs look on them as potential recruits to the forces of the enemy within their gates. The word "Jew" has a highly emotional content.

The problem is also discussed in terms of expediency. The British Government, for instance, is concerned with the pipe-line from Iraq, which runs out at Haifa, and with the need for security across the lines of communication of the British Empire. But those who discuss Palestine in terms of expediency reach imponderables such as the relative weight of Jewish influence on the American Senate compared with the weight of anti-British sentiment in Baghdad.

The problem has been so confused by emotion and expediency that Gentiles often do not pause to consider whether Zionism is the solution of the Jewish problem. It is too easily assumed that the rights of Jews and Arabs are of equal weight and cancel each other. Indeed, the popular view of the problem is that it springs from a conflict of two rights, and that it is therefore Britain's duty to hold the balance between the two. But surely it is necessary to enquire whether the conflict is really one of right against right, and whether the two sets of claims are equally valid? It would be neither just nor wise to hold the balance evenly between right and wrong.

The decision of the problem must be based on justice. Until the leaders concerned are prepared to base their plomacy on justice, their actions will remain dangerously unpredictable, for at one moment they support the liberty of small nations and generally behave like cultured members of the human family, but at the next instant they bargain with trade agreements and the whole apparatus of power politics. Honesty is the best policy for Britons and Jews and Arabs alike.

If the problem of the Jews and of Palestine are seen in this light, certain facts stand out clearly.

First, the problem of the Jewish refugees can only be solved by free countries admitting Jews of their own free will. Great Britain and the United States have the right to demand of the Arabs sacrifices which they have so far given no signs of being willing to bear themselves. The plight of Jewry in Europe cries out to humanity for relief. Let all the free nations of the world take their share in helping these pitiable outcasts.

Secondly, Palestine is an Arab country. It cannot be a just policy to force upon a population settled in the country for thirteen hundred years, a group of alien immigrants who openly proclaim their intention of seizing power and establishing their domination as soon as they have the strength. The refugees from Fascism brought the totalitarian technique to Palestine. Innocent settlements of religious Jews were perverted and the sanctuaries were menaced. Farmers who had struggled to turn desert into orange groves were infected with a narrow nationalism, their children were persuaded to join youth groups, and their young men and women were urged to special training in gangster warfare. Secret meetings, secret training, secret agents, torture and threats, all the accessories of oppression were

brought to Palestine. The pure stream of the Jewish religion was poisoned. Zionism became a world-wide gang.

Violence breeds violence. Though there are thousands of Jews in Palestine who are appalled at the outrages of the extremists, in times of excitement their moderate views are disregarded, and violence increases. Until ways of alleviation are found, the misery of Jews in Europe, the wise, gentle Zionists who first settled in Palestine will be ignored. Until then every Jewish immigrant to Palestine is potentially one more recruit to a vicious gang.

Lastly, the policy of forcing the Arabs to accept more Jews in Palestine is justified by promises which are not regarded as valid by the Arabs, because, they say, those promises gave away something which was never in Britain's possession. In 1939, the Maughan Committee examined, for the first time, the promises made to the Arabs, and concluded that "His Majesty's Government were not free to dispose of Palestine without regard for the wishes and interests of the inhabitants." The Arabs feel that to force them to become in their own country a minority in an alien State would be a betrayal of all the promises and assurances that have been given them. The exact words used in the Balfour Declaration of November, 1917, should be remembered:

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing should be done which may prejudice the civil and religious right of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights

and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

By the time these words are printed, a decision about the refugees in Europe and the future of Palestine will have been taken. But that decision cannot be made effective unless it has the support of the majority of the nations of the world. And it will not be final unless it is based on justice.

The ordinary Englishman who believes we have expended much effort in giving Jewry "a local habitation and a name," may feel angry that this effort, which he believes has been entirely humane, should have produced in the second generation so violent a reaction. But the reaction is against centuries of oppression. It is not surprising that Jews are clever; it is surprising that so many of them are kind and gentle.

It is wrong to assume that if a man is fond of the Arabs he must be "against" the Jews. Both Arabs and Jews are Semitic. (This may be why I am attracted to both.) But economics and a narrow nationalism have accentuated the points of difference between them. And in the East they have grown provincial in outlook. The waste of their ability is sad. For the world has much to learn from the Semitic genius.

IV

"If you are prepared to leave Cairo on the twenty-third," Clayton said to me, "I can motor you up to Jerusalem. We can stay the night in Kantara. And we'll be in time for the midnight Mass at Bethlehem."

For the first time I noticed the wearisome formalities

a civilian suffers who travels in the Middle East to-day. Whereas if I had been in uniform, Clayton's staff car could have sailed past barriers, now he had to wait while my passport was stamped and restamped, while I went through quarantine and security controls. I was stopped at half a dozen barriers on the way. When I apologized to Clayton, he smiled.

"Now you see why I'm so keen on the Arab League," he said. "There should be no barriers between these Arab countries."

The metalled road runs like a strip of dark ribbon through the tawny desert of Sinai, past blue escarpments, jagged and brittle as if cut for a back-cloth, past little boys, young shepherds of a size with their flocks of black goats and shaggy sheep; and then the road turns towards a barren vastness, and the desert is flat for mile after mile of dusty travelling; sometimes to the East are sand-dunes blown smooth by the winds and rounded. Then once again the desert is flat and empty.

The sun was beating down fiercely, and it was hot in the car, so we talked seldom and dozed when we could. Before Beer Sheba we stopped for lunch at a white bungalow called the "Traveller's Rest." I knew that Clayton was suffering from sinus pain. But he would not admit it, and began to speak of the mistake of British policy in Egypt.

"On Sundays in Cairo," he said, "the streets seem to be full of no people but soldiers. Soldiers crowd the restaurants and shops and cinemas. The Egyptians feel that their own capital does not belong to them; it belongs to the British. All our troops must leave Egypt. We should lease the Sinai peninsula from Egypt. The Gardens are lovely at El Arish, and the peninsula provides all kinds of training-grounds except for jungle

warfare, and the atomic scientists will be able to produce that, I dare say, with their artificial rain."

He snuffled painfully.

"It is our snobbery, our exclusive clubs, our Gezira way of life which have partially caused the trouble of treaty revision. Our policy should be one of friendship not of control. I've spent my life saying it."

V

"When you're in Jerusalem," General Paget had said to me, "there's a chap you ought to meet. His name's Altounyan."

"I'm staying with him, sir," I said.

In the dining-room the picture was still hanging in the same place. Dora Altounyan had painted it on a winter morning in their house in Aleppo; it was a view from a window of the Moslem cemetery, covered with snow and glittering in the early sunshine. You could feel the crisp, sharp air and the radiance of the white light.

"That picture's been in my head for three years," I said.

"Come on or you'll be late for the midnight Mass," she replied.

We left at half-past ten. Strings of lorries in convoy crawled along the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Every army vehicle in the Middle East seemed to be on the road that night. Closer to Bethlehem, lorries and cars and trucks were parked nose to tail on the side of the narrow road. At times the whole stream of traffic was stopped, and troops poured out of every vehicle and began walking along the road; friends bunched

together, at first stepping out of time independently, but soon marching in step from force of habit. A bright star hung low over Bethlehem. Men talked and laughed gently in the moonlight. When the traffic jammed no one became angry. A car began hooting. And voices cried softly :

“Put a sock in it.”

“Pipe down.”

“Go muck yourself.”

There was silence again except for the marching of a thousand troops along the dusty road.

Outside the Church of the Nativity a dappled mass of troops and civilians swirled round the courtyard and pressed against the small entrance to the church, so low a man must bow his head to enter.

“Let’s try round the back,” said Altounyan.

We walked along a narrow, dark street, down a flight of stone steps, across a vaulted courtyard, through a stone archway into the dim light of the main part of the church. Shadowy figures were moving softly, intent on their purposes. In the obscurity I could distinguish a sailor holding in his hand a long, thin candle. The small door which led to the chapel in which Mass took place at midnight was guarded by a huge Military Policeman, who was arguing with a very small, very perky Corporal.

“This entrance here,” he was saying wearily, “is only for the Services *with* tickets. With tickets, see ?”

“But I’m in the Services and I was given a ticket.”

“Well, where is the ticket ?”

“I’ve lost it,” said the Corporal.

“Then you can’t get in.”

The bells were tolling. Mass would soon begin.

“But I was told to come to this entrance.”

"Look, chum. This entrance here is only for the Services *with* tickets. *WITH* tickets!"

In the distance we could hear singing. The Mass had started.

"I've got to get in," said the Corporal. "I've got to. I've driven a hundred bloody miles for this."

"I don't care if you've driven all the way from Timbuktoo. If you've got no ticket you don't get in."

"I'm an R.C., too."

"You could be the Third Wise Man for all I care, and if you had no ticket or weren't in the Services you wouldn't get in."

"But I had a mucking ticket."

"Well, you mucking well haven't got one now."

"Come on, be a sport."

"I've got a job of work to do," said the Military Policeman.

He turned to the rest of us.

"Those *in* the Services *with* tickets gets in. The rest stays out."

We were not in the Services, and we had no ticket.

"I'm ever so keen to get in," said the Corporal.

"And it is Christmas Day."

"Oh, come on then," said the policeman.

We followed the Corporal into the chapel.

After the policeman had seen us in he leaned towards the Corporal. Above the singing I heard him whisper:

"I bet you bloody never had a ticket."

"I bloody did," replied the Corporal.

Then they both turned towards the High Altar.

We were standing in a closely packed crowd in the nave. Through a space between thick pillars I could see the long white beard of the Patriarch. I looked about. The chapel was bright and gaudy and over-

decorated with flashy effigies glittering in trim niches. I shut my eyes and listened to the music. Shrill, metallic voices of the Palestinian choir shrieked Latin chants off key. I felt cheated. The whole performance was out of tune with the simple service I had expected.

I began to look at the congregation packed thick about us as we clustered in the nave. On my left were two Guardsmen. They stood erect, as if on parade, and their stance never altered. But I knew they were friends because once their eyes met, and they smiled rather shyly as if a bit embarrassed by the surroundings. Behind them were two Indians in battledress, short and compact like Gurkhas; they could not see much because the stalwart Guardsmen blocked their view, but they stood contentedly with their hands clasped together. Beside them was an R.A.F. officer, rather stout with pale frizzy hair, who was escorting an elderly, prim-looking lady with a blue scarf pinned neatly about her head to cover her hair.

On my right was a young trooper in the Airborne Division, and next to him a thin Polish officer who stood beside a Palestinian soldier and a W.A.A.F. with very pale skin, who was leaning lightly against her friend, an aircraftsman, whose arm was about her waist. Beyond them I could see two Italian prisoners-of-war in thick brown uniforms rather too big for them. And beyond them, and all round the church, row after row of khaki greatcoats spotted with different badges.

Then I looked at the faces of those about me. Their eyes were looking ahead and upwards towards the High Altar, and their faces were solemn and content with devotion to the Man whose life and death had brought them together. Suddenly I looked away, for my eyes were full of tears.

It was after ten when I came down to breakfast on Christmas morning. Propped against my chair was the picture of Aleppo under snow.

VI

Altounyan had managed to obtain from Area Command a large, ancient staff car which rather resembled a tank. In this rumbling antiquity we crossed the Jordan to lunch with Glubb at Amman, for I was anxious to discover his plans before I made mine.

We had settled down to talk in his study when his son, Faris, aged seven or so, came in beating a powerful drum. I watched the scene with amusement. At first Glubb decided to ignore the drum, but though he was able to think and speak above the din, I was unable to hear what he said. Now of old I remembered that he gave his commands in the same gentle phrase both in English and Arabic.

“Would you like to close the window,” he would say, and you leapt to your feet and closed the window quick.

So now he said to his son Faris, “Would you like to go and play that drum outside?”

“No,” said Faris.

Later that afternoon it was decided that I should return to Amman on January 14th when Glubb would fly with me to Akaba.

Altounyan and I drove back to Jerusalem in the darkness.

"What are you thinking, laddie?"

"As I get older shall I go on being as happy and excited about things?"

"So long as your soul is innocent you will."

Altounyan left me at the King David Hotel where I was meeting Albert Hourani for a drink. Three years had increased his modesty and authority. We were raising our glasses in a toast to our reunion when a loud explosion shook the building. However, I knew that a new road was being blasted close to Altounyan's house. So now I smiled knowingly at Albert.

"Blasting," I said.

He gave me a look of polite disbelief. At that moment there was a second and much louder explosion, and the curtains by our table were swished into the room. Then from the hotel roof a siren screeched and wailed piercingly. We rushed into the street. Later we learned that the purpose of the siren was to keep us indoors, but no one seemed to know this. A band of Jews wearing steel helmets and British battledresses had attacked the C.I.D. Headquarters with machine-guns and mortars. Casualties so far were four Basuto soldiers on guard duties killed, and six seriously injured, four Palestine Auxiliary injured, and a British Assistant District Commissioner and two British constables shot and killed while pursuing the attackers.

We walked back into the King David. Sitting fast asleep in an armchair in the lounge was a British officer. To my joy I discovered it was Edward Henderson.

"I'm on leave," he said. "What's all this noise about?"

Later Altounyan joined us.

"The operation 'Holy Sepulchre' is completed," he said.

The next morning we heard that a curfew had been imposed and the roads from Jerusalem were blocked by troops. But this was the day on which Altounyan had chartered a private car to take his guests and relatives back to Damascus. We therefore set out upon the long journey in convoy. First went Altounyan in his cumbersome staff car with his head poked out through a trap-door in the roof, followed meekly by the little civilian car full of women-folk, while Edward and I guarded the rear in an Arab Legion truck. The rich red earth sparkled in the sunshine, and the air was crisp and sweet. Groves of blue-green olive trees climbed up the side of the steep hills and tumbled again into the valleys. In the distance white mountains pointed to the sky, and all the ground we passed seemed holy that morning, and our bowl of happiness was full.

VII

The writer of fiction, as I said before, employs various devices to make an imaginary character seem real. But if the traveller invents a character he must take pains to declare his fiction. Otherwise, perhaps, the invention of Suleiman and Hassan might have been undetected. Yet during my travels in the Levant I have dined with a score of graduates from the American University of Beirut, and if, from those friends and acquaintances, I have chosen material to invent two graduates, may not those two be closer to reality than a meticulous description of a dozen?

An Arabist friend of mine privately attacked a popular travel book about the Middle East.

"It's embarrassing," he said.

"Why?"

"The author keeps pointing a torch at real people and saying, 'Look! There is my servant, Ali. You see, although he's an Arab he can scratch his armpit just like a European can. And look! There's a photo of him eating off a plate!'

"The author," my friend said, "treats the Arabs as if they were specimens in a zoo. It's bad enough in fiction, but when it's real people that are being written about, it's embarrassing."

That is partly the reason for my escape into fiction to describe Suleiman and Hassan.

I met Suleiman at a bar in Damascus on New Year's Eve. The friend who introduced us told me that he was a promising young journalist. He was dressed in a brown suit which seemed only just to contain his ample limbs which bulged out awkwardly. His jowl and his assurance made him look about forty, but Syrians age quickly after adolescence, and I was not surprised when he told me he was twenty-nine. He had a moon-shaped face and his fleshy nose was dominated by thick horn-rimmed spectacles. His complexion was pallid. He was obviously tired, but he took my hand warmly and folded it between his soft, well-cushioned fingers. He spoke fluent English in a monotone, and welcomed me charmingly and ordered a bottle of wine. At first he was rather reserved about himself, but when I ordered another bottle of wine he tried to stop me paying for it, and after we had settled our friendly argument he became less reticent.

"Tophole bottle this," he said. "One of the last

shipment from France. I'm afraid there isn't any bubbly left. I'm a Moslem, you know. But I believe in moving with the times. I smoke and drink. In fact generally I suppose I'm more of the West than of the East."

I looked at him. His skin was light, his clothes were made in England. He would have looked more at home in the Metropole at Brighton than in Damascus.

He smiled at me charmingly. "You Englishmen are always surprised to find we can think and talk and dress like you do."

"How long have you been a journalist?" I asked.

"Ever since I left the University. My wife always told me I should write. I married when I was eighteen."

"Eleven years."

"Yes."

"How old is your wife?"

He looked at me sweetly.

"Which wife?" he said. "I have two. My oldest wife is twenty-seven, and my other wife is fifteen."

He must have seen my look of surprise for he said, "You think it is unusual to have two wives. You are not married, are you?"

"No," I said.

He took a long drink of wine.

"Well," he said, "I can tell you this—and here is the reason why Moslems have more than one wife. After you have slept with your wife for six years, when you lie next to her and touch her skin, it is as though you touched your own skin. It no longer excites you. So you take another wife. And then, later, perhaps, your first wife becomes interesting to you once again."

"However," he added, "the Koran says that the man must perform his husbandly duties with all his wives equally."

"Is that possible?"

He gave me a wink.

"It is certainly possible," he said, "if the husband is born and lives in the climate of the Hejaz. Which reminds me. Have you been to the café round the corner?"

"No."

"You must certainly visit there. You will certainly enjoy it."

We pushed our way past heavy red plush curtains into the crowded café. After the cleanliness of the air in the street outside, the smoke made our eyes water. The room was packed with men.

"The singer is so popular that we may have to stand before we can get a table. Ah, no, because there is the manager who is a friend of mine."

We sat down at a marble-topped table close to a large platform raised about a yard from the rest of the room. Suleiman ordered two araks.

"Just you wait till you see her," he said with his eyes sparkling behind the horn-rimmed glasses.

One by one the band shuffled on to the platform. First came a little man with gold teeth who looked like a clerk from the local bank, and he carried a tambourine. Then there arrived another clerky type, but of a superior grade, who carried a bigger tambourine and looked fat and cheerful. A large funnel was attached to this tambourine to give it resonance.

"It is called the *derbakeh*," said Suleiman. "it keeps the tempo."

Next came two mandoline players in black suits,

followed by a violinist in grey trousers and a bow tie, and an old man with a zither. The band was complete.

There was a volley of clapping and some husky cheering as the famous singer swept on to the platform and stood shyly twisting a mauve chiffon handkerchief in her hands as she waited for the applause to subside and smiled her acknowledgment of this reception. She was clad in a closely fitting dress of blue crêpe. A thin line of blue spangles flickered about her chest and round her hips. She was of a good height and weighed certainly not less than fourteen stone. Round the thick wrist of her right hand was clasped a gold bracelet; round the wrist of her left hand was clamped an outsize American watch. A thin black line was carefully painted over her plucked eyebrows, and her teeth were enormous and white. She smiled once again, handed her yellow shawl to the tambourine player, tossed back her greasy black hair on to her massive shoulders, waggled her body once violently, and burst into song. It was a low nasal screech of astonishing velocity.

"The name of the song she is singing," Suleiman whispered to me excitedly, "is 'Sing for me gently, gently.' "

As she bellowed her song she began to agitate her body curiously. Her head and shoulders and feet remained still, but the rest of her body, which was considerable, wobbled and waggled from side to side. The band-players were not uninterested in this feat, though one felt they were not particularly keen on it. The audience, however, were working themselves into a frenzy, interjecting moans of delight between the phrases of her song and applauding rapturously any outstanding sexual feat. The only man completely un-

moved was the bank clerk with the gold teeth who tapped his tambourine with indifference. The rhythm grew faster and faster, her wobblings and screechings more hectic. A final burst of speed and it was over.

"She is very good as a dancer, too, is she not?" said Suleiman. "And she is large behind which is considered a useful asset by the people here."

"There are only two things to discuss," Suleiman said to me later at a bar up the hill. "Politics and sex. Now since I always end with sex, I will begin with politics. You English are being beaten here by the Russians. The Russians infiltrate: they are getting right into the country. They have agents working amongst the poor who listen readily. You English should support the party to which I belong. This particular Syrian youth party will eventually triumph. We believe in force. We take our members at eighteen because when they are young you can teach them anything. I must tell you about it. There are three degrees of membership. First there are the initiates—those who are just interested, those we have not got hold of yet. Secondly there are the actual members, those who have sworn allegiance to our leader. And lastly there are those who are completely initiated and trusted, and they become our Fighting Members. They know everything and obey the leader in everything. The leader rules on all points affecting the policy of the Club."

"What if a Fighting Member disagrees with the leader's ruling?"

"But he would not disagree," said Suleiman. "However, you look tired by politics. So there is something I must tell you, but in a whisper. In the room upstairs above this bar there is a bedroom with a girl

in it. She is only fifteen, but she is very nice. I know her well already. Shall I speak to the barman so we could both go upstairs. She is good and fat."

"No, thanks awfully," I said. "I suppose I ought to be getting home."

As we walked back towards the Orient Palace Suleiman took my arm.

"I hope this evening has shown you," he said, "that we Syrians in Damascus are no different really from you in London."

"That's right," I said.

I met Hassan a few evenings later in the Orient Palace Hotel. He was twenty-two years old and as slender as a boy, with light brown curly hair and solemn eyes. He wore an elegantly shabby tweed jacket, grey flannel trousers and a gaily coloured tie. He looked more like an Oxford undergraduate than an Arab. He spoke English with no trace of an accent, and I soon learned that he was working in a lawyer's office and intended to launch into Syrian politics when he got a chance.

"You've just come out from England, haven't you?" His voice was soft and charming, and his dark eyes searched my face as if trying to discover something my voice could not reveal.

"Yes."

"What do they think of 'The Yogi and the Commissar'?"

The reply to this kind of question is always futile.

"They think it's jolly good," I said.

He leaned his firm brown chin against the back of his slender hands.

"I don't think Koestler is as important as Kafka, for instance."

I saw the red lights.

"Ah!" I said vaguely.

"What do you think of Kafka?"

"Well," I began warily, "I think . . ."

"Of course one can see that Kafka and Thomas Mann have had a profound influence on Rex Warner."

"But . . ."

"Sometimes I think I can detect a continuous line running from Stendhal through Proust to Gide."

He looked eagerly at me and smiled shyly.

"Can you?" I said.

"Have you read any early sixteenth-century Provençal poetry lately?"

"No," I said. "Not lately."

"In the spectrum of style," he began.

But at that moment there was interruption. It was late, and we were sitting alone in the lounge. I had noticed a bedouin enter, and I had imagined from his robes he might be a servant of the Emir who was staying in the hotel. He now approached us to ask (or so I gathered from his desert Arabic) where he could find the hotel porter.

"Yalla," said Hassan. "Go away."

The bedouin turned softly and walked out.

Hassan lit a cigarette. "If you don't check off those fellows right away," he said, "they'll keep yattering at you all night."

"But he only wanted to know where the porter was," I said.

"Oh, was that all? Really, those fellows' speech is so outlandish I can't understand a word they say."

"Have you never been in the desert?"

"Good heavens, no! Whatever for? Nothing that is purely Arab is any good to me. You see, we have no Art and no Culture. I shan't really live till I get to Europe, then I shall feel I can be myself and breathe. Well, as I was saying, in this spectrum, Kafka. . . ."

VIII

Colonel Morgan, the Area Commander, was as kind as he looked fierce, and he offered to drive Edward and me to Homs. I watched him as he sat stiff and alert in the back of his staff car, complete with an eyeglass, a D.S.O. and three rows of medals, and bright twinkling blue eyes. Then he began to speak with a careful choice of words.

"One morning," he said, "I was travelling along this road when I decided to alight from my car for various reasons. As I stood smoking a cigarette by the verge, there passed by me what was evidently a married couple and a donkey. My eyes, as you can imagine, turned to the maiden. She was young and fair. And this beauteous maiden was on foot, while her evil-looking squire bestrode the ass. However, I appraised her. I appraised her up and down. Presently I ascended my car, and when I passed by this trio again she was mounted while he walked. My appraisement had lent her value in his eyes."

"When I was Commander of the Aleppo area," he said later, "on Sundays I would take out my troops with their padre to the monastery of Saint Simeon

Stylites. He lived on the top of a plinth, you know. I like to think of him squatting in the clouds and issuing his nebulous edicts."

After lunch Colonel Morgan returned to Damascus; and we drove on to Hama where in our dreams we could still hear the whirring of the giant water-wheels and the water splashing from the fountain in the courtyard of the old Arab house where we stayed.

A nearby Brigade of Gurkhas had lent us a staff car complete with driver and his mate, to take us to Lattakia by way of Idlib. The driver was a little smooth man with tiny hands and feet; his mate was a big gawky tough with a rough skin. We set off in grand style. Presently Edward said, "I think we turn left here."

"Turn left here," I said to the driver.

The car drove straight on.

"Turn left here, driver."

"Left."

Perhaps they speak Arabic.

"Shemal."

We communicated thereafter by signs. During the early afternoon we reached the wide, fertile plains of Northern Syria, dotted with little villages of honey-pot shaped houses of mud. In the middle of an empty, wind-swept stretch of country the Gurkhas stopped the car and got out. Edward and I looked politely in the opposite direction, but the little one opened the car door and thrust in an empty petrol can which he tapped while shaking his head.

"But surely all staff cars out here carry extra petrol?"

"Exactly," said Edward. "All staff cars except this one. We've had it."

Edward smiled benignly at the Gurkha.

"Oh, you altogether bloody little man," he said softly. "I'm so glad you don't understand one word I'm saying, let alone thinking."

"How much food have we got? I have got one rather bruised banana."

"I've got nothing, and I bet they've got nothing, too."

"What about water?"

"There'll be some in the radiator."

The lanky Gurkha was already sound asleep. The little one was picking his nose with a straw.

"The great thing to pretend is that we *meant* to spend the night here on this very spot with no food."

"Now how did that come about?"

"Well, we were both of us deeply impressed by Colonel Morgan's story of St. Simeon Stylites."

"And we decided we'd been eating and drinking too much lately."

"And seeing too many people, of course."

"However, we reckoned that a plinth was rather expensive."

"And we didn't want to get talked about."

"So we thought, 'Now where can we find a spot. . . .'"

"Without a plinth."

"With no plinth but absolutely remote."

"And with no chance of anyone finding us for weeks."

"With no food for miles around."

"So we can really mortify our flesh."

"Cairo was hardly suitable."

"Nor was Tel Aviv. . . ."

An hour later a supply lorry appeared miraculously and gave us petrol sufficient to reach Lattakia.

The hotel at Lattakia is built on a wedge of rock jutting into the sea. I flung open the windows of my room and stared out at the silver waters of the Mediterranean and listened to waves washing against the strand. All the weariness of the journey had lifted from my limbs, and my heart was full of peace.

Presently Edward strolled in.

"I've got some local news. Murshid still flourishes,* though the French are shut up in their barracks and aren't allowed out without a British escort. And your friend, the Sharif Mehdi, is married, has got a son, and is waiting to see you downstairs."

Mehdi was waiting for me at the end of the empty dining-room. I had forgotten how impulsive and lithe he was. He rushed towards me. I gave him the little present I had brought, and he clenched my hand.

"But you have already brought us the best present that England can bring us—yourself."

Then his two brothers joined us: Fadel, gay, pleasant, easy to laugh and quick: Zen, the eldest brother, the only one unmarried, and perhaps the most straightforward and the strongest, with fine clear eyes and a wide firm mouth and capable hands. They greeted me warmly, but I had a suspicion, as I met old friends that evening in Lattakia, that somehow they were disappointed in the British, though I knew they would be too polite to mention this on my first evening.

The next morning as we sat in the crisp sunshine on

* In December, 1946, Murshid was hanged for murder.

the terrace overlooking the clear blue sea, I asked them what was wrong.

"Well," Fadel said, "I think it's like this in the Middle East generally. If the Germans had won the war, their friends amongst the Arabs would be in power, and the friends of the English would be out in the cold. Well, the English won the war, but the friends of the Germans are in power and the friends of the English are out in the cold."

"I'll tell you what it is," Mehdi said with the curious hissing intake of breath which came when he was excited. "The English accept whatever power they find in a country and back it. But the Russians take hold of whatever power they find and direct it to their own use."

Then Zen spoke. "Up to date, British success in the Middle East has been due to their physical force. They have made political blunders, but the power of their force has saved them. They have never found a means of natural unity with the Arabs based on a common interest. The only way now that Britain can maintain her position in the Middle East is by discovering one mutual interest which will at once benefit both Arabs and English."

Edward and I strolled along the sea front to the tobacco factory to take coffee with Tewfik Awad, the manager, and his son Farid. The sweet fragrant smell of the tobacco leaves mingled with the tang of the sea.

"Lattakia tobacco originally was only used locally," the manager said. "But to-day in the cigarettes they smoke in America or in Britain you will find little shreds

of tobacco darker than the rest. That is Lattakia tobacco. Its success came curiously.

"One year the crop was so good the peasants had more tobacco than they could sell, so they kept it hanging on the rafters of their huts. The smoke from their fires turned it black. The next year they mixed this black tobacco with the new and sold it as fresh. It was baled and despatched. Immediately the merchants asked for more. The black tobacco was perfect. The fame of Lattakia tobacco was soon established all over the world. The peasants' trick brought them gold."

He turned to Farid. "On no account let that be a lesson to you, my son," he said.

Late on my last afternoon in Lattakia I climbed with the Sharifs to the great White Mosque, glittering high above the city. Spread below us were the narrow streets and murky alleys twisting through the body of the town like arteries along a wrist. Fierce little noises of activity from below fell faintly about our ears, and we could see men and donkeys like ants hurrying about the market and crawling through the dusty streets, which ended abruptly in the clean, blue glory of the Mediterranean, so that it seemed as if man should leave the dirt and darkness of the town and adapt himself to live rather in the freedom of the sea.

The light was fading. And from the minaret which sprang like a needle from the white courtyard, the Muezzin began to send his call for the evening prayer over the worried city. His voice was calm and true.

"God alone is great," he cried. "I testify there are no gods but God and Mohammed his prophet.

Come to prayer: come to security. God alone is great: there is no god—but God.”*

Perhaps his voice was sad because he could see that the scurrying creatures in the streets below did not turn away from their business. They ignored the security and would not come to prayer, for though God alone might be great, their lust for possession was greater.

IX

My friends appeared at the hotel to say good-bye. Unfortunately the car, kindly promised by the Chief of Police to take me to Beirut, did not appear, so we walked up and down the terrace talking the nonsense of departure, until at last the car arrived with a flourish of brakes and a blast on the horn, and there stepped out a police driver dressed in a khaki shirt and breeches. He was lean and hawk-nosed and remarkably unshaven.

“We were in the mountains last night,” he said. “I came straight from the mountains. Will you sit in front?”

“Yes.”

“I will clear the seat.”

Lying on the seat were a dozen hand grenades. To my horror he flung these casually into the back of the car.

Tewfik Awad smiled at me. “I expect you’re used to travelling with those things.”

“Yes. But I wish I thought my driver was.”

We started with a rattle and a jerk, and sped through

* The translation used is by T. E. Lawrence.

the town hooting vigorously while my driver kept up a stream of talk in three languages.

"I practise speaking, *comprenez?* *Yimpkin le* motor stops, *je suis mechanique.*"

"What's your name?"

"Farid. I am thirty-six years old. Look! Is that man figging French? If he is figging French he is not allowed out alone and I shoot him. My name is Farid. I will tell you politics. I know politics. I have ears, I can hear. I have eyes, I can see. Germany swallows first Rhineland then Austria then Czechoslovakia. In England, sleep. Russiya now swallows Finland, Poland, Rumania and you will see Iran. In England, sleep."

He hooted vigorously as we screeched round a corner.

"Mr. President Roosevelt, during the war, promised liberty to all peoples. The war is finished, but where is the liberty?"

We swerved to avoid a cart. "Now I will tell you more politics."

"No," I said. "I'm tired of politics. Tell me about yourself."

"I am married nine years. I have seven children."

"How old is your wife?"

"She is twenty-five. She is very fond of me."

We stopped at Tripoli for coffee in a café shaded by tall trees. As we got into the car again, he took his scarf and wrapped it round his head so that only his eyes showed.

"Laish?"

"I have a girl on this road."

"But why . . . ?"

"I knew her before I married."

"I see." But I didn't, quite.

“ Maybe I stop with her on my way back.”

“ Then why do you veil yourself ? ”

“ Because if she sees me now she will expect a present. I have no present. I buy present in Beirut.”

“ How old is she ? ”

“ Twenty-four now. But she was fourteen when I first knew her. To-day she is married, of course, but her husband is poor.”

“ Isn’t he jealous ? ”

“ Oh, no. He is very poor. He works in the kitchen while I” He took both arms off the steering-wheel to demonstrate an embrace.

As we drew near Beirut he hooted his horn at each girl we approached on the roadside to make her turn round. If she was pretty he made a rude noise as we passed by.

“ I have had no sleep for two days.”

“ Aren’t you tired ? ”

“ No. I am very strong. I will have five girls on this road. I am very strong—just like an Englishman,” he said.

X

I had been given a letter of introduction to a student at Beirut, and we met at the *Café Fayssal*, opposite the American University. He ordered two chocolate ice-cream sodas which the students who frequent the café call “ chocolate mud.” He was twenty years old, with broad shoulders and broad, strong hands. He wore a blue shirt open at the neck, and his brown skin was smooth and clear.

"I'm reading Law," he said. "But as soon as I'm through I'm going out to the villages."

"To the villages?"

"Because they're more backward than the towns." He grinned at me ruefully. "It sounds awfully smug, but you see I'm going to be a reformer."

"You see, social conditions are bad in the Middle East. And when I see that eighty-five per cent of the Egyptians are illiterate and eighty per cent of the villagers have trachoma, I feel we must do something. It hurts me to have good things when others are looking for bread."

"I am a socialist because I believe that social matters must be regulated once and for all. I want the end of social conflicts. I want the ideal society in which we can understand and love each other. I want to develop my mind and spirit so that I can help other people. It pains me a lot to see inequality. I don't like being much above others."

"I think my mission is to help the villages and nomads first. They need social workers. But we cannot help the people unless we understand them. Social workers should be like the Old Prophets. In one village I visited I found they drank from a creek into which, I discovered, seeped drains from a French barracks. I noticed they murmured: 'He does not drink from our water.' So I drank. Later I had the drains altered and taught them the reason."

"The problems of the miserable masses must be solved. But that is not the end. People should love each other and live equally well. The privileged rich cannot have a good life because they must be depressed by the mass of people who lack this good life: those at the top of the scale suffer from lack of equality. But equality

is not the end. The object of man is to increase love."

His voice was calm and confident. And as I watched his firm, strong hands I wondered if he and a few of his friends would stick to their resolve, for if they did the first clean page of social reform by the Arabs for the Arabs would be written.

"What would you say were the three things we Arabs should learn from the West?"

"First, common sense; second, public spirit; thirdly, kindness. What would you say we of the West should learn from the Arabs?"

"First, the spirit of freedom; second, generosity; third, loyalty."

Outside the café, three tipsy British soldiers were strolling along the pavement followed by a flock of children begging for money. One of the soldiers, who seemed drunker than his friends, stopped for a moment and patted the cheeks of the tiny girls and boys who swarmed around him. Then he turned to go, but a girl of seven clung to his hand.

"Money," she cried. "Give money."

"Go on with you," he said.

"Yes, money. Money for me. Look!" And she made a gesture as old as time. There was no doubt what she expected.

"Christ!" said the soldier. "In England it wouldn't be allowed. It's horrible. Oh, God, I wish I could help you. I wish I could help you." He rummaged in his pocket for the remaining coins. "Here, take this," he said, and rushed away after his friends.

XI

Glubb had told me to report to him in Amman by 10 a.m. on January 14th if I wanted to fly with him to Akaba.

Colonel Morgan told me his staff car would call for me at the Orient Palace Hotel in Damascus soon after five in the morning to take me to Amman, a journey of four hours. Walters, his driver, was punctual, and we left Damascus along the road to the Hauran. By the light of a faint red glow to the East we could see, glittering in the distance, the snowcapped peak of Mount Hermon. Soon the Eastern plains were bathed in orange, while to the South in front of us, the sky was dappled white and crimson.

A few miles beyond the grim black stone cottages of Deraa, we crossed the frontier into Transjordan. The Arab Legion guard directed us to the Customs House on a little hill. There was no sign of the inspector, so we found his house and tapped on the window. He opened the door in his sleeping robe.

"Good morning," we said. "We are travelling from Damascus to Amman and have come to be passed by your Customs."

He shook our hands warmly.

"Allah be with you!" he said, and closed the door.

At ten o'clock I reported to Headquarters at Amman and drove to the Philadelphia Hotel, where I breakfasted with Walters. We were both ravenously hungry, and ate three eggs and four rashers of bacon each.

Then I said good-bye to him and walked into Glubb's office at precisely ten-thirty.

Glubb looked critically at my civilian clothes.

"I think we shall have to put you into uniform. Would you like to drive down to the Stores? The plane goes in half an hour." He gave instructions, and I was driven away quickly to the Stores where I took off all my clothes in exchange for a khaki shirt, a suit of battle-dress, an Arab Legion cap for use in towns, and a complete head-dress for the desert. Ten minutes later Glubb arrived in his car, and I walked out and saluted smartly, I was an officer again.

The little plane flew smoothly in the calm air above the tawny desert, and landed on a sandy strip by the blue lagoon at Akaba.

Glubb inspected the guard drawn up outside the police-post with their belts *blancoed* to a dazzling white; then we went to lunch in the police officer's cottage. His servant greeted Glubb with devotion and followed him about throughout the day. Later I discovered the servant's eyes had become diseased, and he was going blind, but Glubb sent him to an oculist he knew in Jerusalem who saved his sight. The white walls were adorned with gay pictures of flowers and red and blue birds painted in wash on the plaster, for the servant was also an artist.

At the next barracks Glubb found by his desk a message for him written in a shaky hand. "This is to show that I can now read and write." Signed, "Mohammed." He sent for Mohammed to congratulate him. Presently a tough, hairy warrior, cross-sashed with bandoliers and armed with pistol and dagger swinging about his khaki skirts, marched in smartly and saluted.

This was Mohammed.

"I am still having lessons, sir," he said.

Letters are coming to the desert.

Glubb made notes slowly in his own note-book, writing laboriously in a round English hand. Then he wrote in Arabic in the Visiting Officers' Book, and his pen moved quickly.

As he sat at his desk writing, I examined him covertly and decided that his personality was difficult to define. Even his appearance was hard to describe. He was wearing the horn-rimmed spectacles he used for reading, and with his grey hair and moustache, he looked like a schoolmaster correcting his pupils' work. But then one caught a glimpse of the arresting blue eyes beneath thick bushy grey brows, and wondered at the quizzical expression on his face. It was an amused expression, and above all it was kindly. One felt that if one tripped up he would have a good laugh, but would not hesitate to take one to his home to recover.

His fingers were blunt and capable, and his hands were sensitive. His trim, compact figure and his bearing told that he was a soldier, five rows of medals showed his competence.

At that moment in my thoughts he rose and walked outside the fortress, where the camel saddles with their gaily coloured trappings were laid out for inspection.

"You would think," he said, "that camels were easy to equip. But in fact they have more spare parts than a tank."

Late in the afternoon, as we drove through the rocky gorges and red sandstone plains towards Rumm, he

settled back in the staff car and spoke steadily in his even voice the thoughts which coursed through his mind.

"The progress of the Arab countries in the last twenty-five years reflects world tendencies. First there was a fragmentation into small states, and the fanatical demand for complete independence. Recently we have seen the formation of the Arab League as a regional group, the realization by the Arabs of their own weakness to resist aggression, and the *rapprochement* of the Arab League to Britain. But Britain has two attitudes. The first is the idealist notion that every Arab country should be independent. The second is the Victorian idea that Arabs are 'natives' or 'Wogs'; inferiors to be kept in their place.

"We forget that Arab countries are liable to blow up at any moment. We forget that those who want to help the Arabs and plead for their independence may thereby be handing them over to be exploited by a few rich men.

"We also forget the emotionalism of the Arabs. They react violently to snubs and give affection generously, because they are more moved by emotion than by reason. They are more likely to bestow affection on a chap with whom they have a natural sympathy than on a man, however deserving, whose personality does not appeal to them. Therefore, selection of the right personalities is more important than decrees."

The truck which was escorting us was out of sight in the wadi, so we waited for it to reappear with its bunch of bedouin bristling with guns.

"Arab nations," he continued, "have got independence just when transport has broken down the desert barriers, at a time when modern communications

make independence very difficult in practice. The whole Arab block lacks the degree of industrialization of one small European power.

"The Middle East is essential for the survival of the British Empire. But it is not essential for any other power. What Panama is to the United States, Egypt is to Britain. What the South American continent is to the United States, the Middle East is to Britain. The Monroe Doctrine doesn't stipulate for the political or commercial domination of the United States over the other American republics. It merely lays down that the United States would resist the establishment of any other Great Power in the Western Hemisphere as a menace to her safety. In the same way, Great Britain doesn't want to dominate the Arabs but to prevent any other power from doing so. Let's have a Middle East Monroe Doctrine. Let's have very few, but very good officials. Let's take more trouble with the students and less with the statesmen. Let our policy be discussion, not dictation."

The car passed over the soft sand between two vast crags of red sandstone which were the beginning of the Valley of Rumm. We were silent as the car moved up the solemn valley in the half light after sunset. We crossed a long tamarisk-covered slope, and presently we could see, glittering in the gathering darkness, the pale crenellated towers of the fortress of Rumm, dwarfed by the two cliffs of a thousand feet high towering above it on either side.

We walked stiffly across the courtyard to a low, black, goat-hair tent, half open to the evening and illumined by two oil-lamps and a fire in the centre. We

sat down on the floor which was strewn with camel rugs and a few thin carpets, and talked with the guards of the fort, while young Abdullah, duty man for the evening, handed round first a few drops of fragrant coffee in tiny cups, and then sugary tea in small glasses. When all had been served he stood rigidly to attention with the kettle still in his hand, and his large eyes fixed on the Commander-in-Chief who, with his legs tucked under him, was talking happily to the Sergeant-Major.

A bowl of hot water was brought outside the tent for us to wash our hands. Then a sheep roast whole on a mound of rice was carried in on a large platter. We squatted round it and began to eat. Glubb showed me the technique of moulding the hot, sticky rice into a little round ball with the tips of one's fingers, and levering it into one's mouth with the thumb.

After we had washed again, Khalaf, a staff-sergeant of twenty-three years, who seemed to feel himself responsible for me, led me to a tiny room in the fort and put on me the red and white head-cloth and circlet of the Arab Legion. I felt a perfect idiot for the rest of that evening; later that month I would have felt a fool without it.

Outside the tent a ripe moon shone down into the valley of strange shadows. The night was cold, and we were given scarlet cloaks lined with thick fleece to put about our shoulders. I sat happily with one arm leaning against the padded camel-saddle which served as a support, listening idly to the conversation between the soldiers and the Pasha as we sipped coffee and later tea, until weariness settled over me, and I rose and excused myself and said good night. But Khalaf followed me to my room and made me repeat the parts

of his uniform. The desert policeman wears a khaki tunic double-breasted and skirted, like a cavalry great-coat, cross-sashed with bandoliers. A dagger glitters from the waist-belt clasped over a broad red sash, and a red lanyard, tied round the pistol-ring, loops down at the side of the skirt with two red tassels. I went to sleep murmuring, "*Fashak fard, fashak banduqiya, hizan, khanjar. . . .*"

I slept badly and was already awake when about seven o'clock some soldiers came in to say good morning. They returned immediately with hot water for shaving, and tea and army biscuits for breakfast.

We drove in bright sunshine across the shimmering desert to the Turkish fortress of Mudawwara, two-storied and powerfully built about a square courtyard part strewn with rugs and carpets in our honour. The camel trappings hung up tidily on hooks made brilliant splashes of colour against the whitewashed walls. Five coffee-pots stood in order of size amidst the ashes of the fire. As we arrived the young men of our guard recognized friends in the garrison and kissed them in greeting. I sat talking to the men in my halting Arabic while Glubb made the tour of inspection.

"The cat's in poor condition," he said when he returned an hour later, "but I don't think I'll put that in the report."

We drove eastward to the Mudawwara station of the destroyed Hejaz railway. The station buildings have remained untouched since the autumn of 1918, when Buxton's force assaulted it by night and captured it at seven in the morning, killing twenty-one Turks and taking one hundred and fifty prisoners, with two field-guns and three machine-guns for the loss of four killed and ten wounded. They watered their camels "while

men blew in the wells and smashed the engine-pumps and two thousand yards of rail."

While we wandered about the ruins, Mohammed discovered in the rubble a button from the tunic of a Turkish soldier which he gave me. As I held the button in my hand I wondered what manner of man had owned it and perished in the assault twenty-seven years ago. On that dark night, when the first shells fell about the station, did his heart swell with passion against the enemy, so that his spirit was uplifted and he faced death with fortitude, or did he feel nothing except dull fear and an aching emptiness, did he simply perform his duty—no more, no less—until he was killed?

We drove northward beside the disused railway, past Turkish breastworks and trenches until the soft red of the sandstone country changed abruptly to the flat grey-ness of the limestone desert, and our way travelled beside the pilgrim tracks worn smooth by the treading of centuries of men and camels to Mecca. We met four Sudani pilgrims so woefully ragged and shivering that it seemed as if their ribs might pierce the emaciated flesh stretched tightly over them; their black, spindly legs were thin and bony like dusty sticks of ebony. We gave them the bread and eggs we had, and our escort helped them into the truck.

The headman at Maan, where we dined that night, told us that two pilgrims had died in the bitter cold of the previous evening.

I awoke in the police hut to hear Glubb saying softly,

"The thing making a noise like a battleship is the local oil-stove."

After a sumptuous breakfast of fried eggs, cold chicken and fish and sweetmeats with the Sheikh, we drove away from the pleasant white huts of Maan set trimly on a hill and crossed the grey desert to Wadi Musa, the green and bushy valley in which Moses struck the rock. Black tents were pitched opposite the water-place where the stream gushes clear and cold from the naked cliff.

"Why did you come out to Arab lands in the first place?" I asked him on our journey to Jafer.

"Oh, well," he said, "you see, I was a regular soldier when the 1914 war broke out. And I was a Sapper during the war. But then after the Armistice I was sent back to Chatham again. And I couldn't stick that. I found the life dull and confined. So I volunteered for Iraq."

He chuckled. "I can remember when I first got out here, eating chicken at some Arab feast and thinking, 'What a lot of messy, dirty natives!' That was how it began."

Later he said, "Gibbon got the Arabs right. He said, 'The Arab is personally free.' But when we give a Middle East country democracy we don't necessarily give it equality, and the chaps lose their personal freedom. Some of the effendis have no bowels of compassion for the peasant. One Arab Prime Minister said to me, 'What does it matter if there is poverty in Egypt? Half a million people can be fed. What does it matter what happens to the other sixteen million? They are only animals.' The effendis get clever at the Univer-

sities, but they lack the wisdom of the peasant in the desert who has more wisdom than you or I because he lives close to starvation and death."

The light was fading over the flat, smooth desert when I walked away from the Arab Legion outpost at Jafer towards the ruined fortress of Auda, the tall, passionate leader of the Howeitat tribe in the Arab Revolt. I was thinking of this dead warrior as I stepped through the crumbling gateway to the fortress in the dim, blue light. Suddenly a tall, strong figure in a flowing burnous stood before me. I stared fascinated at the fierce black beard, the large, eloquent eyes, and the powerfully hooked nose. It was Auda to the life. The man spoke.

"What do you wish here?"

I stammered some explanation.

"You have heard of Auda Abu Tayih? I am his son. I am Mohammed Pasha, the son of Auda Abu Tayih."

He led me up a flight of worn steps in the corner tower and out on to the rampart. He pointed across the darkness of the desert.

"My home is yonder," he said, "far beyond the hills. I would be honoured if you would visit my home."

I thanked him, and we parted.

After the evening meal in the Legion fort, the warriors produced grubby exercise books for Glubb's approval. He examined each book at length and discussed its contents with the bearded pupil. Then he turned to me.

"Their instructor makes them copy out wonderfully schoolmarmy saws such as 'Learning builds up houses on pillars; ignorance destroys the house of the greatest,' and 'The written word remains after the death of the writer.' I wonder if they believe it."

He sat for two hours that evening talking to the soldiers. All round the circle their eyes were riveted on him. I tried to fix him in my memory as he was then, smiling happily at those who addressed him, while his hands played with a string of amber beads. Now he would let the beads slither down their string one by one into his other hand. Then he would toss the string into one hand so that the beads slid between his fingers.

I tried to think what I would say if someone asked me to describe him. It is the quietness of the man that is impressive, I think I should have said, the quietness and the gentleness and the humour. He can make them laugh. Yet all his movements are dignified. He is very small, but there is an impression of power.

We retired after a long discussion about the price of camel trappings. He paused at the door of my room.

"Are you sure you won't be cold? You don't seem to have got many blankets."

"I'll be all right. I'm going for a stroll in the moonlight."

"Good night."

When I returned, his overcoat was on my bed.

Glubb would have been happy to have stayed in the desert, but he had to return to Amman. He left me at Fort Bayer in the charge of Khalaf Effendi, a plump young officer with shining eyes, who was going to arrange my next expeditions.

"What shall we make you?" Glubb said, before he left.

"I don't mind."

"We'll make you a Captain."

I drove back to Fort Jafer with Khalaf in an open truck. The mirage made the caked sand-flat about us look wet, like damp crazy paving. I wondered what accounted for the influence Glubb has over the Arabs. First, I think it is his patience. I have never seen him exasperated or angry; I have never heard him raise his voice. Next, perhaps, it is his honesty and selflessness. He does not react personally. Most of us react according to our reception, but he seems to be able to detach himself utterly. Then he has a great sense of humour, and he can make Arabs laugh. There is his deep affection for them which they know. But, of course, the catalogue cannot be completed. For there is that undefinable compound of qualities we loosely call personality, which makes one of us weak and another strong.

XII

"Auda Kobron, the corporal, will be your guide on your expedition to-morrow," Khalaf Effendi said.

Later in the darkness the young Bedu Zrail drew me aside.

"Auda Kobron has no ears. He is deaf. You tell the officer you want take me as your guide. Tell him, 'I want to take Zrail.' "

"Perhaps I'll take you another trip."

He clasped my hands, and ran away.

Auda Kobron was a lean, tough man with his black hair twisted into two plaits which fell about his neck like snakes. His dark brown face was narrow and pock-marked. He had a thin moustache and a little beard at the tip of his chin. He was tall for a bedouin, and his eyes were keen and nervous.

In the morning I found him loading the camels for our journey into the desert.

"This is Ashwa, your camel," he said. "You will ride Ashwa."

I liked Ashwa immediately because she had not got that unbearably supercilious look which most camels have. She was large and shapely, with a light tawny coat and fluffy golden ears which I used to stroke when I knew her better. She lay with her legs folded under her, groaning, pleasurable I thought, while Auda tied her girth; and she chewed her cud with loose, flabby cheeks from which trickled a stream of saliva.

The guard turned out in full strength to witness our departure with cries of "Allah bless you." I shouted "Hup" to Ashwa, who with a rocking and groaning jolted to her feet, and we set off to the north at a brisk trot which almost dislodged me from the wooden saddle. Then Auda showed me how to twist my legs about the front pole of the saddle, to ride with my left leg crooked over the other, resting on the left flank of my camel, and to change sides when that position became unbearably painful.

It was a crisp winter morning, and the air was fresh under a clear blue sky. By noon the strong sun bathed all the desert in warmth. My thighs were sore, and my back ached, for this was my first journey on a camel. Auda stopped in a wadi dappled with blue-green camel-

grass, and tapped the neck of his beast who lurched groaning to the ground.

“Food,” he said. “We will eat here.”

I swung stiffly from the saddle and lay flat on my back. I felt as if I had been beaten all over. I watched him lazily while he hobbled the camels and cut clamps of dry bushes with his dagger, and scooped out the sand for a fire. He took out from the camel-bag two large bundles of tea and sugar wrapped in a cloth, together with two little glasses. He put three glasses full of sugar into the kettle and one glass full of tea, then he poured in water from the obscenely wobbling black water-skins.

A livid scar ran the length of his sinewy leg. He passed his finger over it.

“War,” he said. He had been wounded in the Hejaz fighting in the army of Ibn Saud.

I peeled back my sleeve to show him the scar on my forearm.

“War,” I said. We shook hands solemnly.

He carefully placed a heap of twigs in the hollow he had made in the sand, and put a match to them. On to the tiny flame he put more twigs and then dry bushes. While we waited for the kettle to boil, he washed his hands scrupulously all over. Then he took some flour, mixed it with water in a tin bowl, and kneaded it into the shape of a pancake. This he placed flat on to the ashes of the fire and covered it with half-burnt twigs. On top of that he scooped up ashes mixed with sand, and covered it once again with half-burnt twigs. Then he scoured clean the metal dishes.

“The food is called arbud,” he said.

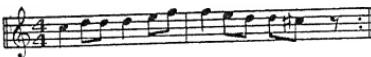
He turned it over and covered it again with ashes. Presently he uncovered it, beat it against a rug to get rid of the ashes, scraped it with a dagger, beat it again,

cut it in half, and handed one half to me. It had a warm, salty taste, and was delicious to eat, washed down with sweet tea.

Although he had tied a cord about her two front legs, his camel had wandered away in search of better grass farther on. He chased her, shouting angrily, and when at last he caught up, beat her heavily.

I climbed stiffly into the saddle, Ashwa jerked to her feet with a grunt, and we set off again to the north towards the mountains of Tuweiyil Shihaq. The hot, flat desert was now covered with swarms of black, shiny locusts three inches long. Their dry wings and desiccated bodies made a nasty rustling noise as they crawled and hopped about the sandy bushes.

We passed the swarm. The sun blazed brightly over the desert from a cloudless sky. A gentle, fresh wind fanned our faces. It was a great thing to be alive in the freedom of the desert. We urged our camels into a trot, and Auda burst into song. His chant had no words, no end and no beginning. It was a phrase repeated over and over again with slight variations in rhythm. I took it down thus:



By the evening I had forgotten my joy at the openness of the desert and the peace, for I was horribly sore. Each step Ashwa took was a new pain. In the distance we saw four hyenas lolling away towards the mountains. At last we came upon a low, black goat-hair tent. Standing outside was a wizened woman with a blue tattooed chin and a black veil tied round her head. She wore a black smock roughly stitched with thick red

thread and pleated with patches of blue stuff at the waist. She looked incredibly old. She was pregnant.

The woman welcomed us with dignity and showed us into her squalid tent. Then she brought us a bowl of cold camel's milk, sharp and salty to taste, but refreshing. Along the back cloth of the tent was stretched a cord with loops hanging from it; a loop was put round the necks of each little black lamb to prevent it from straying at night. I was afraid she would kill one in our honour. But her man was away, and the full pride of hospitality was mercifully forsaken. The crone threw some big lumps of dry camel-dung on to the fire and began to roast coffee beans on a large flat spoon. Next, she ground it with a mortar and pestle, and added *hael* to give it fragrance. The coffee was delicious. A woolly little child tottered into the tent with its arm round the neck of a baby goat. Auda produced our cold arbud, which we shared with them, together with our tea which they drank noisily out of politeness. After food the woman produced a home-made pipe with a metal pipe-cleaner attached to it by a chain; she lit up expertly and puffed away through her wrinkled mouth with contentment.

We slept on the open ground outside the tent. The night was bitterly cold, so I kept on all my clothes, including my boots. The desert sparkled in the moonlight. I slept fitfully. Auda whimpered in his sleep as if he were being beaten; perhaps he was dreaming of some punishment in the Hejaz war. Neither the old crone nor the camels seemed to sleep at all, for whenever I awoke she would be hissing, "Krrrh, Krrrh, Krrrh," to make the goats and camels lie down. Sometimes they would try to wander into the warmth of the tent. The camels chewed steadily throughout the night.

"Camels never sleep," Auda said.

I woke shortly before dawn to find the little boy being taught by his mother how to bind up the teat of a camel. Presently she brought us fresh warm camel's milk, sweet and pleasant to drink, quite different from when it is stale and cold, but equally indigestible as I discovered later. We made fresh tea and arbud, which we shared with them, and then departed with her blessing.

Shortly after our midday meal, we met three brothers pasturing their flock of camels. We made some more tea, and I asked them to join us, which they did shyly. The oldest I learned was named Májid, and he was seventeen years old, he thought. He was a tall, lanky boy with knobbly hands and a large nose. Mo, aged fifteen, was a smaller, shyer edition of him. But Menwar, aged twelve, with bright red hair and a wicked face, was perky and obviously adored his brothers.

"Does the soldier belong to you?" he asked.

"No. To a friend of mine."

"Where do you come from?"

"London."

"I'll be a soldier and travel with you to London," Májid said later, as we sat drinking coffee round his father's fire.

In the afternoon he took me to see the camel his father had given him. We strolled across the desert.

"I've been married over a year now," he said.

"Have you any children?"

"No. My wife is young. She is fifteen. But she is good at loving and will be good for children. When I first married her—I was married a year and a half ago when she was thirteen, she was very expensive—she

would not talk to my people. She would not speak at all. So I used to beat her with whatever lay at hand, generally with branches of bushes. And now she is very good. I love her very much."

He clasped his large hands together and looked at me with hot brown eyes. His thick, protuberant lips parted as he smiled.

"To-night she is with her father. But I hope to see her when we move to-morrow."

He obviously loves her passionately, and wears a piece of her stitching as a charm hung from a string round his neck.

There were sniggers round the fireside as a figure stumbled into the tent from the moonlight to join us.

"It has no mind," whispered Menwar, who looked like a little monkey, curled up in his father's lap with his brittle legs and heavy lids with long lashes.

"It has no mind," said Májid.

I looked up at the tattered man. I first noticed his huge eyes, red-rimmed and bloodshot, staring wildly from beneath bushy, black brows. He had a fine, strong nose and a thick moustache and beard. Thick hairs curled about his unshaven neck and down his chest. The hair of his head was matted and dirty; his hands were large and moved nervously.

They asked him questions such as, "Who is the soldier?" "Whence is the officer?" And he answered quickly anything which came into his head. He spoke in a suppliant tone of voice, like a candidate at an oral examination, desperately anxious to please the inquisitors.

"Was he always like that?"

"Oh, no. He was very well and strong once. But a man took a big stone and struck him on the side of the head so that there was a huge gash."

"Why?"

"Because the man found him sleeping with his woman. At any rate, that's how the story goes. And there was a great gash in his head. And ever since then he has been out of his senses. After he has eaten here to-night, he may wander away. We may not see him for weeks. But he always turns up again."

A woman of seventy years old, the matriarch of the family, staggered into the tent and flung down her great burden of brushwood. The men immediately made room for her round the fire. She sat down and lit her pipe. There were tattoo marks about her chin, and a blue blob marking each cheek. Her right nostril was pierced by a silver ring. When she joined in the conversation they listened to her with attention and respect. Women have no status in the Moslem world, but their influence over their sons is strong.

We rose from the fire to squat round a dish of leban and bread mixed in a sauce, so that after Auda had mashed it all up with his large fingers, it had the colour and consistency of porridge.

When all had finished eating they handed the lunatic a one-stringed instrument made from a kid skin stretched over a hollow box with a stick thrust through it.

I waited. First he played five notes separated by a quarter-tone. He played the notes quickly in succession over and over again. Then he began to sing. His voice was loud and hoarse. And it was still as if he was trying nervously to satisfy his examiners. For his eyes searched our faces as if in dreadful fear of finding

disapproval. His song was jerky. Each phrase ended abruptly, and some of the men round the fire would interject ribaldly, and the rest would laugh. But presently he turned away from us and looked towards the moon which shone like a gentle searchlight on his face. At once his voice changed. It became soft and true. While his eyes seemed at last at peace, as he stared back at the moon, thinking God knows what thoughts.

They laid out a mattress strewn with blankets and trappings in a corner of the tent for me to sleep on. I slept well. I awoke at dawn to see their father sitting cross-legged in his place by the fire, watching the coffee-pot through half-closed eyes. He gave me tea to drink, and then coffee. The lunatic was gone. Auda was still asleep and whimpering, but I knew that none would wake him, for all the Arabs reverence a man's sleep. They think he is in a trance with God.

I wandered out into the crisp winter morning. I could see the mist of my breath in the cold air. The rays of the early sun were slanting across the desert until they reached the mountain of Tuweiyil Shihaq, domed and rounded. When I turned back towards the bedouin camp I thought I had lost my bearings, for I could see only one tent standing where before there had been three. Then I remembered. They were moving camp. After we had finished breakfast in the remaining tent, the women began to dismantle it. They ripped out the pegs which held the lengths of stuff together, they rolled up the black cloths of hair, gathered in the tent cords, packed up the furniture, the rugs and mats and bolsters, and collected the bedouin implements, the flat spoon, prongs, trident, kettle, coffee-pots, mortar and pestle—their worldly goods.

The camels for the women were saddled with a high frame superstructure, into which were placed the babies and small animals, a puppy and three hens.

"*Salaam aleikum,*" we said.

"*Allah yisalmak.*"

As Auda and I trotted across the southern slopes I turned and saw the whole family together with their donkeys, sheep, goats, dogs and sixteen camels, moving northward. But of the place where their home had been I could see no trace.

Auda Kobron's theory about camel riding for novices was this: "First day, a long ride; next day, go gently; third day, you'll be all right." This was the third day, the Legion fort was thirty miles away, and I was not all right. I ached all over. My thighs felt as though slashed with a knife. Ashwa was also mopy, and lagged behind Auda's brute. I was too tired to urge her forward. Auda turned round and grinned at me with his long, narrow teeth. Then he burst into his endless chant. Heaps of locusts lay dead on the barren sand. I was thankful when in the distance, through the afternoon mirage, I could see the fort of Abu Tayih. Suddenly my fatigue lifted. At the same time Ashwa raised her head and sniffed the air. Then she broke into a shuffling trot until our first journey together was finished.

That evening I determined to make notes at the end of each day until I returned to Amman.

XIII

Day of rest. Called at seven with tea and army biscuits. When you ask the jundis why they joined the Legion, they all reply simply and without shame, "Money." That poverty is shameful is a cruel Western idea. After three years' service they will return to their tribes with their money, one to Nejd or the Yemen, another to Iraq or Syria. They come from all the lands of Arabia, yet they are closer to each other than to the *shenageet* or townies of their own country, for they are all bedu. The skirt-wearers are a people; the trousered-ones have been scattered along the shores of the Levant by the tides of innumerable migrations and invasions.

Zrail likes life in the Legion, and hopes that his family will join him from Nejd. It is quite a pleasant existence. They need not trouble about water, food or clothing. The wives live in black tents pitched close to the fort. And at Jafer there is even a school for their children where they sit next to the sons of tribal sheikhs. I visited the schoolroom this morning and found fifteen little boys with black woolly heads writing industriously in exercise books—which is generally more than their Papa can do. In one corner of the fort I discovered three swarthy warriors spelling out the words of a child's story as they learned to read.

Khalaf Effendi, the plump Second Lieutenant in charge of the fort, is amiable and generous. Sometimes he looks sad, and then we know that he is thinking of his wife, who died a year ago. He leaves camp early

each evening for his home where he lives alone with a soldier to look after him. He is even-tempered and tolerant, and controls his men without effort. The discipline at all forts I have visited seems excellent, firm but not harsh.

My Arabic progresses slowly because the bedouin usually have at least three alternative words for every ordinary townee word.

“*Shu hada?*” they will ask, testing me out.

“That is a cloth,” I will say.

“In Arabic,” they will reply, meaning in *their* Arabic, “it is called a ‘rag.’” I begin to write down “rag” in my little book.

“Or ‘duster,’” one will chip in.

“No. No,” says another. “That is a ‘clout.’”

“Or a ‘napkin.’” And so on.

Last night when the *shenageet* wireless operator insisted on talking in French to me as we sat round the fire, I said rather briskly, “Look, *mon vieux*, I’m trying to learn Arabic so do stop nattering at me in French.”

“May I just speak one word further to you in French? I do not wish the rest to hear.”

“All right.”

“I noticed you ate little from the dish of bread. I have a tin of beef in my room if you would like it.”

I felt a brute. “Thanks awfully, but I’m not hungry.”

However, I accepted his invitation to tea this morning so that I could admire his prowess on a number nineteen wireless set. The main Arab Legion forts are in wireless communication six times a day. His procedure was perfect.

We were joined by the bedouin, Mutelag, who is

reputed to be a fine hunter. When he saw that I had noticed that his eyes were cunningly darkened with Kohl, he took out a stick of Kohl in an embroidered holder, and showed me how he painted the rims of his eyes by closing the lids over the stick and drawing the length of the stick carefully to and fro.

“It makes my eyes so they can see better,” he said. But I suspect the main reason is vanity.

After lunch of arbud and milk, I wandered away from the fort, alone into the desert, until I found these sand-dunes where I’ve been lying naked in the lovely sunshine dozing and writing these notes.

For the last six hours now I have been alone in the desert, which stretches all around me as far as I can see. The noise of my pencil as I write this is quite loud. Otherwise there is silence. I wish I could discover the reasons for the peace which has slowly filled my heart. There is the material fact of silence. The immense stillness of the desert smoothes out the creases in my mind. In towns one may not notice noise, but it is always present, disturbing. Here all is quiet. There is no movement. Even the sky is still.

The air is dry and fresh, and I take in great draughts for the sheer joy of being able to breathe. There is no barrier to sight, no building or hill to distract or confine vision. I need not turn my head to know I can wander in any direction without hindrance. All is open. All is free. I am on no man’s property. There is no ceiling of cloud above me, only an azure vastness. And all is clean.

I am alone. Solitude wraps round me like a cloak. Yet I am not alone. For the stuff of goodness and of evil is about me, and I can draw in what I choose into my soul. Besides the great clearness I feel at this

moment, reason seems a cloud. Our limbs of perception are weak and uncertain. We see little, we learn little, we feel little of the stuff of Godhead, because we are immersed in the flesh of our bodies. Sometimes by chance the curtains of desire are pulled back and we can perceive love and hatred and the infinity beyond them.

As I write now, the sand is golden in the setting sun. The world seems to be waiting, not tense with expectation, but patiently and with contentment, for the miracle of darkness.

XIV

Early in the morning we left in two open Ford trucks for the desert journey south-east, to visit Mohammed Pasha Abu Tayih at Tobeik. I travelled in the leading truck, expertly driven by Selman, a hairy, trousered mechanic with a fierce black moustache and delicate hands. Perched noisily in the back was the guide chosen by Khalaf Effendi for the rest of my travels, Sudan.

Sudan was a young bedouin, full of vigour and impudence. He was finely built and carried himself proudly. He was so beautifully poised that it was not until he stood beside me that I realized how small he was, perhaps an inch or two less than five foot high. His face was dusky, oval in shape and perfectly smooth with soft down on his cheeks. Dark, sparkling eyes peered inquisitively through thin slanting slits beneath his delicate brows, which were set well apart. A great shock of thick black hair, dry and wavy, fell about his head and neck when he removed his head-cloth at

the first halt. His feet and hands and waist were tiny. His brown skin seemed to glow with health and happiness.

No one who heard Sudan singing at the top of his voice would doubt that he felt himself personally free. Before the end of the morning I knew the words and tune of his refrain:

Eliad Eliad Eliadill yemma al Baidiye
Ya jorkh min fasalak lil helu sidriye
Tintain wurden sawa winte khalawiye.

My darling, my darling, my darling of Baidiye,
I envy the cloth that shapes your breasts.
Two maidens are gone to the well to draw water,
And you are alone.



As the cars moved swiftly across the flat, open ground, sprinkled thickly with small black stones, we spied a flock of gazelles to the north; but I would not change course to follow them. Then, alas, one of the beautiful creatures sprang up quite close. Immediately Selman swerved to chase it. I would not allow my scruples to spoil their sport. The car rushed forward. Sudan offered me his rifle, and when I gave it back to him, began to fire rapidly over my shoulder. He missed each time. Then Selman, the driver, seized the rifle from him. The car yawled over. I seized the steering-wheel. Selman kept his foot hard down on the accelerator and fired wildly. The gazelle twisted and turned in frantic effort to escape, but the desert was flat for miles around, and I knew there was no hope. The second car

had caught up with us in the hectic race, so I signalled for it to take over, and we slowed down. The first shot from Mutelag killed the animal outright.

We passed close to El Unab, a huge hump of black rock rising stark and awe-inspiring from the grey sea of desert. It is the last outpost of the dark limestone area. To the east the scene changes abruptly to orange, amber and senna-coloured rocks springing out of yellow sand and bright green camel-grass and bushes. We halted to eat in a radiant tamarisk-covered valley. An old gindi from the second truck began to skin the gazelle while Sudan fetched brushwood for a fire. He stripped the skin from the hind legs, working carefully along the body with his hands beneath the pelt so that the whole skin came away clean in one piece like a sheath from the knife. Both the meat, cooked in a pan over a great fire, and the liver, roasted on ashes, tasted delicious. It was lovely to see the men's joy in eating it, but I was not hungry.

In the afternoon we drove south-east along a wide valley flanked by orange mountains. The sand was soft and the going was difficult. Mohammed, the gap-toothed, feckless driver of the second truck, signalled to us to stop. His car was pulling badly. Selman, the mechanic, strode over to examine it. The engine was still running. Now, though I have passed a maintenance course at Bovington, I still believe in leaving a car well alone, so long as it still moves. I cannot help feeling it is a mistake to fiddle with an engine until it is dead. But Selman sprang into the bonnet like a fox into a hen-coop, and presently entrails of the Ford lay oozing oil into the sand. I waited for a bit while Sergeant Selman and Corporal Mohammed, in their filthy battledresses untidily clamped round their tiny

waists, mucked about with plugs and pipes. Fitter-mechanics are the same the world over, I decided. They are not really happy until your car does break down. So I left them to their orgy, and went for a walk with Sudan.

When we returned an hour later, Selman announced that the second car was dead, so we gave out food, ammunition, blankets, water, matches and so on, and left the lithe, feckless Mohammed and Mutelag the killer to guard the iron corpse. I was glad to see they looked happy at being left together. Then the rest of us piled into Selman's truck and travelled past craggy crumbling rocks to Tobeik, where we found the herds of Mohammed Pasha grazing in a golden valley. Nine large black tents of the Howeitat were pitched on the hillside.

Mohammed Abu Tayih greeted me gladly and led me into the guest tent where we sat drinking coffee with the sheikhs of his tribe. Sudan, who was very possessive, showed me the movable side-flap of the tent which could extend or diminish the right half where the women slept and cooked. The sun was setting behind the tall mountain a mile away, and as we talked we could hear the women in the valley crying, "Urrri, Urrri, Urrri," to call in the sheep.

At the hour of prayer, I walked away from the tents up the hillside so as to leave them alone. When Mohammed Abu Tayih joined me, I was watching a snow-white baby camel with sprawling legs like an absurd toy.

"Do you like it?"

"It's very sweet."

"I will give it to you."

"It's awfully kind of you," I said, thinking of what B.O.A.C. would say when I came to declare it as excess

baggage. "But I think it would be unhappy in London where I live."

"Are there no camels in London?"

"Very few."

In his tent was a tattered, dusty copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* which Lawrence had given his father.

"What struck you most about him?"

"I was only a child," he said. "I can remember well his smallness and his gentleness. He was quick and pleasant. But what we admired most was the endurance of his camel rides. He rode from Tobeik to Jafer in one day."

He had slain a sheep in my honour, and we ate hungrily in silence. My gums, accustomed to the meatless pappy food of England, were sore from the unwonted exercise.

As we sat round the fire in the guest-tent, Mohammed took my hand.

"You are now a Howeiti. You are a member of my tribe."

"Thank you very much."

"Mabsut?" he asked. "Are you happy?"

I knew the formula by now.

"I am happy, the praise be to God. Are you happy?"

"I am happy if you are happy."

"I am very happy," I said.

"You must marry a Howeitat girl and live here. I will find you the best girl of my tribe."

"That's jolly kind of you," I said. "But I must go back to England."

"Why?"

"Because my people live there. But when I'm older and when I'm tired of life there, I'll come back. And

then I'll marry a Howeitat girl and live in Tobeik."

"*Enshallah!*" they said.

Sudan's lips were cracked and bleeding, so I gave him some unguent, which he took suspiciously. I dreamed a stupid worry dream of missing a train and being late for a lunch party, which seemed all the more futile at dawn, when I awoke and stared out across the blue valley.

Warm camel's milk sweetened with sugar was brought us in small glasses. Sudan's lips were no longer bleeding, and he was vociferously grateful. After breakfast I insisted on leaving to rejoin the second car.

"Think of poor Selman and Mohammed el Meskin, the wretched one, with no warm camel's milk and no dish of bread and leban."

I thanked Mohammed warmly and left with his blessing. A few miles away Selman insisted I should visit the tent of a sheikh who was a friend of his. I was installed in the guest-tent for coffee, with the sun blazing in my eyes and a great fire blazing in my face. I dripped with sweat and found civility an effort. At last we departed, taking with us an old man who wished to visit Jafer. Mohammed and Mutelag were away hunting when we reached the second car, but after a two-hour orgy with sandy entrails, Selman and Mohammed announced the car was still dead and must be towed. Patience is not only a virtue in the East: it is a necessity. At the first jerk the tow-rope snapped. We twined the two lengths together and started again. Clouds of sand churned up by our wheels blew straight into Mohammed's face till he was yellow all over. This he considered a tremendous joke.

"Now I really am the wretched one," he shouted.

I climbed up the Black Rock with Sudan in the bright sunshine until shouts from below told us food was ready. They had cooked the remainder of the gazelle with three tins of beef sausage which I had given them. Sudan taught me to eat in the Howeitat manner, which consisted in making a great masticating noise and sucking one's tea as a horse drinks water. I imitated Sudan's style of eating precisely, which pleased the gindis, but I thought the civilian looked rather disapproving. When we could eat no more we packed up to go. I noticed the three tins were unburied; they were glaring eyesores in the clean desert.

"Oh, the bedouin leave things lying about."

"That's why they have so many flies round their camps," I said firmly, and buried the tins.

As we crossed the mud flats east of Jafer, a mirage made the peak of Tuweiyil Shihaq seem to spring from a vast sea. Sudan was obviously worried about the next day's trip.

"You can't go by car. It must be by camel."

"Of course."

"You must say to Khalaf Effendi, 'I want Sudan for my guide.'"

"All right."

"I know the country by Mudawwara."

"All right."

Later that evening he came to me almost in tears.

"Auda says he is going."

"Perhaps he is."

"But you promised I should go."

The tears started to his eyes.

"I'll go and see Khalaf Effendi."

Presently I returned.

"It's all right. You're going."

"As your guide, Captain? Alone with you, ya Bek?"

"Yes."

"*Sawa, sawa*," he said. "We will travel together. I will see about the camels."

I was not such a fool as to imagine his excitement to go was for love of me. I supposed he wanted a change from life at Jafer.

We decided to leave at eight. At eight-thirty Sudan decided Ashwa's saddle was lop-sided, so he took it off and began to load her again. At nine we said good-bye to our friends at Jafer. As soon as we were out of sight of the fort, Sudan took off his army boots and socks and settled the folds of his khaki skirt comfortably in the saddle. Then he began to sing at the top of his voice:

"Eliad Eliad Eliadill yemma al Baidye
Ya jorkh min fasalak lil helu sidriye
Tintain wurden sawa winte khalawiye."

The grey desert stretched flat around us as far as we could see in all directions. It was a brilliant morning, fresh and not yet too warm. At eleven we stopped to eat arbud and a tin of beans washed down with tea. Sudan was in a great hurry to get started again.

"Ishrab ya Bek. Drink up. Drink up. Away. Away."

I refused to be hurried, and stroked Ashwa's fluffy ears before climbing on to the saddle. Compared to Gaude, Sudan's camel, she was slow and rather lazy. But she was taller and more firmly built and far more beautiful.

All through the heat of noon, Sudan urged me on.

"Beat her. Beat her. Make her get a move on."

"She's all right."

"No, no. Beat her."

I would dawdle happily along, meditating on the glory of the desert. Then:

"Ya Bek! Ya Bek!"

"Yes."

"Catch up with me. Beat her."

At three o'clock I said, "Look here, this isn't a race."

"No, but we must hurry or we shan't have time to visit Sheikh Selman."

"Why should we visit Sheikh Selman?"

"That's where we must spend a night."

"But why?"

"He's a great friend of the Basha's."

"Are his tents far away?"

"Oh, yes. Very far."

"Do we have to go there?"

"For meat and water."

"But we've got water in the skins."

"Yes, but not meat."

"I've got meat in a tin. Ox meat."

"As you will," he said, rather sulkily.

"Why do you want to go to the tent of Sheikh Selman?"

"Because he's a friend of the Basha."

I gave up. I was sore and tired, and it was an effort to have to search for every word one wanted to say. By five o'clock I was exhausted. Sudan kept shouting to me to catch him up, but I was too annoyed to answer. After I had been silent for a while, he waited for Ashwa to draw level to Gaude. Then he looked at me.

“ Mabsut ? ”

“ La.”

“ Laish ? ”

“ Because I’m tired.”

“ We must go a long way farther if we want to visit Sheikh Selman.”

“ Muck Sheikh Selman for a start,” I said in English.

“ What’s that ? ”

“ I said don’t let’s hurry. If we take four days to reach Mudawwara who cares ? ”

“ Khalaf Effendi said three days.”

I supposed it was, therefore, a point of honour with him to finish the journey in three days.

Presently he said, “ Ana mush mabsut. I’m not happy.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because you’re tired,” he said, and smiled so sweetly I forgave him and smiled back. He burst into song again. Suddenly he stopped singing.

“ Do you come from Lindin ? ”

“ Yes, I come from London.”

“ Do you possess many girls in Lindin ? ”

“ No.”

“ Are you married to any girls in Lindin ? ”

“ No.”

“ Ali, my brother, has a little girl. You should marry her when we go to stay there. She’s very little and ever so nice.”

“ Good.”

“ Perhaps you will find a girl in a bedu tent tonight.”

“ How old is your wife, Sudan ? ”

“ Sixteen.”

“ How long have you been married ? ”

"Four years. I have a son two years old. Ya Bek, you really should get married to a Howeitat girl and live with us. You and I and our wives. Sawa, Sawa. Side by side."

To the south I could see the faint outlines of what I knew from my map and compass was Bir esh Shadiya, a station on the derelict railway. The desert behind it was red in the setting sun. Sudan obviously disapproved of my using a compass which he considered a slight to his sense of direction. But campaigns in the Western Desert had so conditioned me that I felt uncomfortable if I could not tell my position precisely at any moment. This was far beyond the scope of my Arabic to explain. We reached the narrow-gauge railway-line. Sudan lifted himself in his saddle to look around, but there was no sign of any bedouin tent, so rather sadly he made his camel kneel, which meant, to my joy, the end of the day's journey.

While he unloaded the camels, I strolled across to the ruined station. Two arches are still standing, but the little viaduct has been broken in five places. The line was repaired after the war, and the bridges were patched up with rubble which has now been washed away by the rains. The Turkish trenches are still there, and bits of rail.

"Blown by Lurens," said Sudan.

We drank some tea and ate a little cold bread. There was no good camel-grass, and we spent a very cold evening on either side of a tiny fire. Sudan gave me most of the blankets and slept soundly. Ashwa chawed and dribbled and grunted in the moonlight. At last I fell asleep.

XV

Dawn six. Tea and cold bread. Start seven. Riding very painful. Mudawwara lies almost due south. But Sudan insists on moving W.S.W. "For water," he says. I don't believe it. However, maalesh. Take no notice.

XVI

With any luck I have got an hour to write. I am quite exhausted, and I have lost track of the date. I have also lost some skin and an illusion, but not, I hope, my sense of humour.

Yesterday it was obvious we were travelling W.S.W. while Mudawwara lay S.S.E.

"We must have water. The way we're going there is water. Masses of water."

I gave up trying to write notes at the noon halt because Sudan kept saying, "We must go. We must get to the water," and "Have you finished yet? When you get to the bottom of the page that will be the end." So we trudged on westward over hill and down wadi of this same black limestone of which I'm now tired. Sudan rides his camel so neatly that from a distance he looks like a jockey on a racehorse, while I lumber along like a Brobdingnag on a dinosaur.

When one is wounded in battle, the feeling of duty

accomplished and perhaps a certain glamour assuage the pain. But there is nothing romantic about being very sore and stiff and tired so that each movement is an effort of will. I began inwardly to blame my body for being untrained and soft, to blame Ashwa for being slow and lazy, and to blame Sudan for being obstinate and incomprehensible. Above all, I blamed myself for being unable to rise above physical fatigue. And the more I blamed, the deeper I sank into the dungeon of my pain.

"To-night we find bedouin tents. And there, Bek, there will be camel's milk and a girl for you."

I turned over the pages of my pocket dictionary to the letter "S" so I could say, "I expect both will be sour." Then I chuckled and gave it up.

"Camel's milk and a young girl for you. Do you want a girl to-night to marry?"

"No," I said. "But I do want some camel's milk."

"In the tent it will be nice and warm for the Bek to sleep to-night."

"Good," I said.

We moved steadily to the west. I could, of course, order him to go south-east, straight to Mudawwara. But I reckoned I would learn more from him if I treated him as a guide and companion than if I spoke to him as an officer to a corporal.

At last we saw a flock of goats in the distance. Sudan began a long shouting match with the shepherd across the valley. Eventually he said, "The tents are to the south." It was evening, and the herds were being driven in to the camp. The little black lambs trotted meekly behind their mothers. Our camels stumbled along a narrow wadi with steep, stony sides until we reached five lowly bedouin tents pitched on the moun-

tainside. A dozen curs rushed out at us barking, the lambs bleated timorously, our camels groaned, men shouted at the dogs, and a middle-aged man with a beard, in tattered robes, greeted me and led me to his poor tent.

While we sipped coffee I noticed a large, full sack in one corner of the tent. I was so tired that the ragged men about the fire and the instruments for food and coffee took on odd shapes in the perspective of my weariness. Once I thought I saw the sack move, but when I looked again it was motionless.

The Howeitat bedouin of these hills live on the margin of starvation. When Sudan produced the stale arbud from yesterday's lunch, the haggard men round the fire snatched eagerly. Tiny bits were given to the tousled children who tottered about the edge of the tent in different stages of nudity and development. Sudan also produced tea and sugar which were quickly popped into the kettle. As is customary after sundown, Arabs from the other tents came in to join the headman in his guest-tent (kinsmen kissed Sudan ceremoniously), until at last there was no more room round the small fire, and children were turned away to make room for newcomers. One child of about five years old, clad in a thin cotton smock, looked pitifully dejected when he was pushed out into the cold to make room for an evil-looking old man. I signed to the boy; and rather nervously he came and sat beside me.

"What's your name?"

"My name's Smaer," he whispered shyly.

The first thing I could think of to amuse him was my compass. The illuminated dial fascinated him until he discovered my matches. He had never seen matches before. I had shown him how to strike a match, and

he was on the point of making his first solo experiment, when his elder brother snatched the box from his hands and rushed out into the night. Smaer burst into tears. In despair I produced a pencil and a sheet of paper. He was amazed that he could make marks with the pencil. I looked up from his scrawls and saw the sack shudder convulsively. Something was alive in it. Somehow from that shudder I knew that whatever animal it was must be horribly ill. I tried not to look. But its shape haunted me. The sack was four foot long, and about three foot broad.

Sudan tactfully mentioned that I was tired so that I could make my excuses and get to sleep early. As we rose to sit round the dish placed outside the tent, I heard the evil-looking old man mutter, "But if he's a soldier why is he tired?" Why, indeed. The dish was full of cold, greasy rice mixed with bread. In the middle of the rice was a well of dark, stale oil. The smell almost made me vomit. The oil, which I discovered later was melted butter, was evidently a luxury, because they kept dabbing it over the rice by my place at the dish. I smacked my lips and tried to look happy and to seem to eat more than I did. As the guest of honour I had to make sure that I went on eating until they had all done. For all of them would rise from the dish when they saw I had finished, and I did not want to spoil their meal.

We returned to the fire. The children were sent to bed, and blew me kisses as they left the tent. The coffee-cup was handed round. Sudan said loudly:

"Would you like to sleep now?"

"Yes, please."

"I'll make you a bed next to Ashwa."

I was tongue-tied now the children were gone. How-

ever, Sudan soon returned and said that all was ready. I thanked my host and said good night to the company. As I stepped out into the night, dogs rushed at me from all sides, barking furiously. My bed, which was a yard away from the kneeling Ashwa, on the side of a steep hill, consisted of three blankets stretched over the stony ground.

Smaer's thievish elder brother, who was trying to look as if he had helped Sudan lay out the blankets, whispered to me, "To-morrow you give me a packet of cigarettes."

"You'll have to ask Sudan about that," I said.
"He's got all the cigarettes. I don't smoke."

"All right. Good night."

I lay in an agony of cold discomfort watching the stars and thinking.

This journey into the desert was to have been the climax of my voyage. This journey was the final reason for my visit to the Middle East. This, here and now and all around me, yesterday and to-day and to-morrow, was to be the test. And already, in a way, I have failed. For I know now—quite distinct from my weariness—that I could not lead this life. Even if I could speak fluently, even if my limbs had become hardened to lying on stony ground, as Sudan's feet have become tough and flat from walking barefoot, even if I owned the loveliest young thing in the tribe, I could not lead this existence.

Primitive life, we are told, must be governed by strict convention. If your only luxury is coffee, it is good to make a ritual of its preparation. If you can only offer a visitor bread to eat, it is well if you make a ceremony of your offering and he of his acceptance. If you have as your home only one small, low tent,

divided by sacking into one side for you, your wife, and your lambs to sleep and feed in, and another side in which to entertain, it is convenient if your friends know before they arrive that they must squat close together round the fire and ignore what happens in the dormitory. If your boy is growing fast and begins to cause trouble at night, it is expedient to marry him off to the most suitable girl available, even if she is only twelve years old; they will mature together. Physical conditions are bound to influence a people's way of living. Convention may be described as the set of rules created in the course of time by a community in order to adapt itself to its environment. Generally, the more precarious the environment, the stricter the convention; the more secure the environment the less strict the convention.

Bedouin live on the edge of starvation. Drought may destroy whole tribes. And their code for living is rigid. However, they can be bounded by this code and yet count themselves "the kings of infinite space." The Arab may be personally free. But I, the European, am not in this way personally free. Therefore this code which does not confine the Arab, does confine me. And herein lies my mistake. I have confused three things: the Arabs, the bedouin way of life, and the desert. I am fond of the Arabs. However, I do not enjoy the bedouin way of life, because a formal society tires me whether it sits round drinking tea from a Dresden pot, cocktails from Lalique glass, or coffee from one tiny cup. But I love living in the desert; for so far it has always brought me peace. And I still believe I could adapt myself to its conditions in my own way.

Having reached this conclusion I felt happier. I could now afford to examine my physical state. The

sun had burned the skin off my nose, which was like a piece of raw meat. I was lousy; the semi-sedentary lice were bearable, but the nomadic ones, crawling over my stomach, kept me awake. My haunches and shoulders ached like a wound. And I felt sick.

"Very sick indeed," I said to myself in conclusion, and chuckled because it was all so utterly horrid. Then I turned over once again to try to find sleep, while the dogs barked, the camels groaned and a flow of conversation poured from the tent.

This morning I got up at 5.45. The sky was a dull, dark blue. It was bitterly cold. I sat on my bed in the open, and shaved, surrounded by Smaer and his friends who watched the performance with such awe and admiration that I laughed and cut myself. Sudan called out from the tent that tea was ready. The men were already sitting round the fire. I said, "Good morning," and they enquired after my health, and I said, "*Il hamdullilah mabsut*," and were they well? And they replied that, thanks be to Allah they too were well, and would I care to have some tea. And I said, "Please, thank you."

At that moment, a strangled coughing noise came from the sack. The top slowly opened, and something began to squirm slowly out of it. In the half light I could not see what it was. Then I perceived a claw-like hand and a grey robe. It was human. I wondered whether I should turn away, but I could not. I was fascinated with horror. My host threw some tinder on to the ashes which sprang up into a flame and illuminated a face contorted by age and covered with mucus. The creature crawled to the opening of the tent where

it stopped and lay trembling. My host went to it, and I turned away as I understood the reason it had left its bag. Presently it was carried to the fire. I could now see that it was an old man. Water dripped from his eyes and from his mouth, and mucus dribbled from his nose. It seemed as if he could not close his mouth, for it was wide open and revealed two yellow teeth, long and tapered like fangs. A dirty robe fell loosely about his chest which was covered with thick white hairs like soiled wool. The men propped him up solicitously, and he knew what they did, for a high-pitched grunt came from him.

"He's very old indeed," Sudan whispered to me. "I think he's a hundred and fifty."

I looked at Sudan. He was not a bit horrified. His face was wrapt in awe. With his wide brown eyes and smooth skin he looked like a boy of sixteen. And I wondered whether he would live a hundred and fifty years and be put in a sack and taken out to clean and feed once a day.

"I pray Allah you will all live as long as him," said our host.

"*Enshallah*," we said in chorus.

"A sudden death for me," I thought.

The same cold dish of rice and rancid oil from the previous night was produced. I made a fair pretence of eating, though my inside heaved against it. At seven o'clock we rode away with thanks and Allah's blessing. We trotted up the winding wadi which was pleasantly splashed with clumps of bright green bushes. When we climbed up on to the plain, Sudan turned off due west.

"Mudawwara is south-east from here," I said.

"No water that way."

"But we've got water in the skins."

"The water's finished. Or almost finished."

The plain ended in a narrow tongue of ground. From the tip of this we beheld a different world. We were standing on the edge of the high limestone desert. A thousand feet below us, through a great, red gorge, we could see the sandstone desert sparkling in the sunshine with scarlet and orange rocks rising abruptly, like giants, from the yellow sea of sand. It was brilliantly unreal, like a country of dreams.

To spare Ashwa, who was stumbling with fatigue, I walked down the gorge, past clear-cut changes of strata in the cliff-side. An hour later we reached a wadi carpeted with white and pink crocuses. I looked at the map. To my joy the wadi was marked. I called out to Sudan as casually as I could: "This is the Wadi Hafir, isn't it?"

"Yes, Bek."

I looked at the map again. I had known this would happen if we kept moving west. Mudawwara was sixty miles away.

"We're nearer to Rumm than Mudawwara."

"Oh, no, Bek. Rumm is far away."

"Not so far as Mudawwara," I said. "What about stopping for some tea and some food?"

"Not yet. We have no water. When we get to water we should stop."

"All right." I painfully shifted position in the saddle.

When we had been riding for five hours without a halt, I began to grow restive.

"Where is this water?"

"Near, ya Bek. Very near."

His eye caught sight of a shepherd miles away on the side of a mountain, and the usual shouting bout began. Presently we espied three tents. His face lit up. I did not want to stop to eat in the tents because of my troubled stomach. But the men who greeted us appeared friends of his, so once again I made pretence of eating from the dish of rice and rancid oil, all the more smelly because it was warm. We produced tea and sugar and they filled our skins with water. Then we took our leave.

After we had been riding for an hour across the golden plain, Sudan stopped carolling and said casually, "My home is not far from here. In fact, if we were on the top of that mountain we could see the tents."

Then in a flash I saw. It was so obvious that I cursed myself for an idiot for not having guessed before now. I looked at my map to confirm. I was right. Ever since we had left Jafer we had been travelling steadfastly, true as an arrow from the bow, straight to the target—Sudan's young wife. The plan was so simple and impudent that all resentment at the forced marches of each day left me. And if I had not used a map and compass, if I had not been suspicious of all navigation in the desert except my own, his plan might have succeeded, and I might have been rather surprised at the number of days it took to reach Mudawwara.

"Rumm is a long way away," he was saying. "We should spend the night in my brother's tent. And then we should travel to Rumm in the morning."

But for once I must over-ride his will. For when we did not appear at Mudawwara they would suppose we had met robbers.

"No," I said. "I'm afraid we must go straight to Rumm to send a wireless message."

"Kefak," he said miserably. "As you will."

He sang no more, and wrapped his head-cloth across his face so that only his eyes were visible, which glared at me reproachfully. Half an hour later he broke his silence.

"Bek?"

"Yes."

"*Ana awzha.* I need my wife this evening. I need her badly."

"Look, Sudan," I said. "We must reach Rumm to-night, however late we ride. But I will make you a promise. The first trip I make from Rumm will be to your tent."

"To-night."

"Not to-night. To-night Rumm. But later."

It was twilight as we entered the stark valley. Sudan was delighted with the echo.

"Ya Bek!" he would shout.

"Ya Bek!" the dark cliffs answered him.

"You must answer 'Yes' when I say 'Ya Bek,'" he said. "That makes it better."

Thus we shouted our way along the valley between the two gaunt ridges of rock towering above us. Soon darkness fell, and the awe of the place made us silent. I urged poor Ashwa forward. At last, like a phantom in a dream, the ramparts of the fort gleamed through the darkness ahead of us. I can vaguely remember being given tea and food, and being taken to my room.

XVII

This morning I awoke to hear Khalaf Effendi rebuking someone in the room next door, and then a storm of bitter tears. I think it was Sudan; he looked very crest-fallen when he brought me tea and biscuits.

"I am going to be handcuffed and thrown into prison," he said dramatically. Later, I told Khalaf that the decision to travel to Rumm had been mine, and Sudan was reprieved.

The fort servant, a shabby civilian, brought me hot water in which I shaved and washed all over to get rid of my lice. I learned to my surprise that he was a prisoner.

"I got a year's imprisonment," he told me. "I was a morphine smuggler from Syria to Egypt. Once I got four hundred pounds for two Kilo. It was good money. So I tried it on again and got caught."

He has no feeling of guilt because it was wrong, but he is slightly regretful he was stupid enough to get caught. Two things worry him. He is a *shenageet* from Homs, and sometimes cannot understand what the bedouin say or do. And he is not allowed his wife; he misses her terribly.

There are nine tents dotted in the desert behind the fort for the gindis' wives. Old Corporal Mutawer, with a black goatee beard and wizened, sallow skin, has two wives, one old woman and one girl he bought recently, who is very young. I wondered how they lived together. Did they quarrel or were they friends in bondage?

According to Alois Musil, who spent many years with the bedouin, they probably managed the situation with

common sense. This is what he has to say on the matter:*

"In case a husband is not fully satisfied with his first wife, he generally takes a second one. The first wife in the beginning is much displeased with her new companion or neighbour . . . and abuses her to the best of her ability. 'Why didst thou come to me? Couldst thou find no one but my man? O thou daughter of a So-and-so! O thou cursed in both thy parents!' However . . . in a comparatively short time peace is concluded by the women and they live together like sisters.

"When a man has two wives, each cooks for him a day in turn, and on that day he usually eats and sleeps with her. Such is the woman's right, which nobody is allowed to violate. . . . Even when he does not love his wife, the man should devote himself to her on the nights belonging to her. He need not have sexual intercourse with her, but neither must he with the woman he loves. In such cases he usually sleeps in the men's compartment, or lying down at his wife's head he says: 'To-night I wish for nothing,' and the woman dares not say a word. Sometimes the women haggle among themselves: 'Let me have the man to-night!' 'What wilt thou give me for it?' If they can come to an agreement, the woman who has the right of sleeping with the man that night . . . says to him: 'I grant thee furlough, now go to thy wife over there!'"

I climbed up a cleft in the mountain block behind the

* p. 230, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins*, by Alois Musil. Published by the American Geographical Society, "Oriental Explorations and Studies," No. 6. New York, 1928.

fort; it was strewn with giant boulders as if the Almighty had grown tired of the symmetry of the thousand-foot-high range and had hurled part of the mountain down to earth. I climbed along a ledge half-way up the crimson face of the cliff until I reached the green mossy place where a tiny streamlet runs from a fissure in the rock. The damp air was fragrant with the smell of mint and moist fern. A luxurious fig tree sprouted by the little basins of limpid water. Nabathæan inscriptions were cut in the rock above the spring. I pondered on the markings. What manner of men were these? Were they as well equipped as I am to find happiness?

Freh, the marksman of the fort, appeared with his rifle to guard me as I climbed down. The bedouin say there are tigers in these mountains; I only saw a sandy fox, perhaps the father of the disreputable fortress cat which is striped black and yellow. We passed a patch of sand decorated with mauve and white crocuses.

“Quwaiyis,” I said. “Pretty.”

“Not good,” he said. “They’re bitter. The sheep won’t touch them.”

Sudan ran out to meet me, wild with excitement.

“It’s all right,” he said. “You, Bek, and I can now leave for my home. Camels will be ready tomorrow at eight. Can we go?”

“Yes.”

He rushed away in triumph.

There were two reasons why I wanted to visit Sudan’s home. His people wandered in the hills beyond the mountain of Sharif Thuraiya, which I wished to see. Also, I was curious to catch a glimpse of his wife, though I realized this might be impossible.

XVIII

Sudan was so excited he forgot to wake me, so I slept until eight, when he came in and said, "Aren't you ready?" He stood for a moment watching me with large eyes full of reproach.

"Ashwa is still tired. You will be riding Zeyala to-day."

"When I've had breakfast," I said.

I found him saddling Zeyala in the castle yard. She was an awkward-looking brute with a dirty white coat. I disliked her at sight. As soon as I swung my leg over the saddle she leapt up without even a warning grunt so that I nearly tumbled off. She trotted briskly through the yard. Then she bolted. I pulled on the halter, but she arched back her neck as if it was made of rubber, and moved all the faster. I clung to the saddle with both hands. As I jolted up and down in the saddle I tried to comfort myself with the thought that she could not run for ever. I disliked the idea of a fall because we were moving over stony ground. I hung on grimly. At the end of four miles she slowed down, and I pulled her to a halt. Sudan drew up to us. At first he tried to conceal his mirth, but after a few minutes he burst out laughing.

More sedately we walked down the valley between the giant cliffs of crumbling craggy sandstone; we lunched in the shelter of a deep crease of rock. A sharp wind was chasing thick clouds across a leaden sky.

Sudan was full of happiness and laughter. He chatted gaily as he neatly prepared arbud, which we mixed with some sausages. The meal was delicious. All through

the afternoon he sang at the top of his voice while we trotted past orange rocks rising like monstrous icebergs from the ruffled sand. Towards sunset we met a wild, hairy shepherd. Sudan asked him the way to his home, which might, of course, have moved overnight. We turned through a narrow pass into a valley surrounded by steep mountains.

A few minutes later, Sudan burst out, "Look ! Look ! There it is. There it is."

He urged his camel to a stumbling trot over the stony ground. In a fold of the valley eight tents were dotted beside tall bushes of camel-grass. He beat Gaude's head to make her kneel.

"Look ! Look ! I can see Ali."

A lithe boy came running out to greet us. He led our camels to one of the nearest tents. As Zeyala, grunting and groaning in protest, fell to her knees, Sudan said casually, "This isn't Ali's home. This is the home of Sheikh Selman."

Then I understood why it was so important to visit Sheikh Selman. Sheikh Selman was Sudan's oldest brother.

He was a tiny little man with a neat, pointed beard and a black moustache. Even in a flowing *burnous* he looked trim and dapper. He fussed about putting down rugs and covers round the fire. At last we settled down happily, but he moved us again to lay down more blankets in case we were uncomfortable. Seeing me look like a village idiot when he nattered away at me in Arabic, he concluded I was deaf and began to make his remarks very slowly, which helped, and at the top of his voice, which did not. I had expected Sudan to rush to his wife. But there he was, sitting meekly by the fire, rising decorously to greet each kinsman with a

kiss. There were now sixteen of us in the circle. The sheikh gave us coffee, and Sudan offered them sugar and tea from our rations. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and ran into the other side of the tent. We heard rapturous kisses, and murmuring, while the old men smiled, and I tried to carry on polite conversation with Sheikh Selman.

Half an hour later, Sudan returned with his two-year-old son, very sweet and solemn, whom I kissed dutifully. Then he spied a rubeyby hanging from the side of the tent, and he began to play. He played so that its single string sounded not mournful and distressed, but like a quiet voice. It was the voice of a being who has seen all the goodness and all the evil in the world, and now recollects his life in tranquillity. Nostalgia was there, and pain. But above all, it seemed to me as I looked round the hairy, worn faces now relaxed in contemplation, the voice proclaimed with the quietness of certainty that all things in the world are one and that evil and goodness wash around us as the sea washes about the earth.

I think I shall remember Sudan as he was then. I shall see him in my mind as he sits in this circle of men on the sand round the fire. His face is raised to the mountain towering above the tent opening. By the firelight I can see that his features are in repose; for the pain of his desire has been assuaged, and in his slanting eyes are glistening the tears of happiness.

A relation appeared, and the spell was broken. At that moment I noticed a hole in the curtain separating us from the women and children. It was about two inches wide, and by turning my head a fraction to the left while Sheikh Selman bellowed politenesses at me I could just see a pair of hands resting on a lap. The

hands were those of a young girl. I felt sure it was Sudan's wife. I shifted my position casually to get a closer view. But when I next turned my eyes towards the slit, the hands had vanished. All through the day I had wondered if I would catch a glimpse of Sudan's wife. I now began to yearn to know what she looked like.

The sun had dropped behind the tall mountains flanking the valley. The sheikh and his friends left the tent to say their evening prayers. This is the moment for one who is not a member of their faith to leave them in peace. So I wandered away from the camp and admired the evening. Wraiths of white cloud twisted about the twilight, and vast grey ghosts of mountains seemed to lean inward over the valley as if sheltering it from the world outside. Presently I found myself walking back to the tent from the north side, so that I would have to pass by the opening where Sudan's wife, Ageyle, lay. My curiosity was now intense. But in front of the tent I met Sheikh Selman standing over the tiny corpse of a black lamb he had slaughtered in my honour. And I was so grateful and worried by all this that I forgot to look.

For an hour or more I sat in my place of honour by the fire, smiling, I hope naturally, but longing for the food to be finished so I could decently go to sleep. My arms ached from the strain of pinioning myself to the saddle when Zeyala bolted. Each time I refused with polite gestures, another helping of sugary tea, my glass was refilled. They began discussing ages, and I was amazed to learn that many of the haggard men were only in their early thirties. The bedu's life is hard, and he wizens young. Not one of them was certain of his age. "Perhaps I am thirty-seven," said one, and "I am thirty-four approximately," said another.

I am rather ashamed how quickly and irrationally I take likes and dislikes. For instance, there was a wall-eyed man of fifty in a dirty *burnous*, whom I liked immediately. But I began to detest a thin-faced man with a long, sharp beard; he would keep asking me questions, and he interrupted my view of the slit in the curtain.

“The Captain comes from Lindin,” said Sudan.

“How long does it take to go from Egypt to London by steamship?” old thin-face asked, in a supercilious tone of voice.

I didn’t know, but I wasn’t going to tell him that.

“To Lindin?”

“Yes, to London,” he bellowed.

“To Lindin from Egypt?”

“Yes, to Lindin from Egypt.”

“Three weeks,” I said very quietly.

“Oh, no,” he said. “Not three weeks. You mean three days.”

If it had been old wall-eye, I’d have agreed. But his bellow was contemptuous.

“No,” I said. “Three weeks.”

“He means ‘days,’” he said confidentially to the rest of them. “He doesn’t know the word in Arabic. He means ‘days.’”

“No, I don’t. I mean ‘weeks.’”

“From Lindin to Egypt?”

“Yes,” I said. “Three weeks.”

“I know what it is,” he said to the rest of them.

“He’s deaf.”

“I am not deaf,” I said firmly. “From Lindin to Egypt,” I said, loathing the whole voyage, “twenty-one days.”

For an instant he was disconcerted, but he rallied nobly.

"That's a slow steamship. A very slow steamship. Now a fast ship can do it in three days, *mu haiq?*?"

"Yes," I said. "*Haiq.*"

After all, what did it matter?

At last the little lamb was brought in, well roasted and neatly arranged on a bowl. We gathered round in a tight circle which shut out the firelight. Eating in the dark is tricky if you are as ignorant of anatomy as I am. However, most of what I ate tasted delicious. There was more conversation, more tea and coffee and then Sudan said to me in a loud voice, "You want to go to sleep now, Bek, don't you?"

"Thank you, yes," I replied. "And I expect you do, too."

Rugs were laid down in the sand at the back of the tent, and blankets were wrapped tenderly about me by Ali and Sudan, who said good night to me and departed. For a while talk murmured round the fire, but soon men began to drift away to their tents. I lay awake, impatiently waiting for the last one to leave me alone, because the rugs were so placed that by sitting up in bed I could see through the slit, and from shadows on the tent-top I knew that a fire was burning in the next compartment.

I looked round furtively. I was alone in the tent. Cautiously I sat up in bed and began to bend my head towards the slit. Then I lay down again. Somehow I felt it would be wrong—not morally, just plain wrong, as a note can be wrong in music—to look through the slit. So I lay back in bed. And presently I fell asleep.

I awoke at three o'clock, and lay on my back, thinking. I was now at the farthest point of my journey. I had left belongings in London, some more in Cairo,

some in Jerusalem, some in Amman, some at Jafer. Apart from my battledress I now had only a razor and a toothbrush. Of what other than clothing had I stripped myself? Of skin, certainly; perhaps of a little conceit and an illusion. But for that one moment as I stared out into the starry night, I was stripped of desire. And I felt light as air.

XIX

This morning I awoke in the light of a cold, blue dawn. Standing outside the tent with her face turned towards the mountains was a young girl. My heart leapt with excitement, for this must surely be Ageyle, Sudan's wife. But the dogs began barking; and she moved quickly away so that I only had a glimpse of her.

While I was shaving Sudan appeared, looking exhausted.

"You know my camel, Gaudé," he said.

"Yes," I replied, thinking: "Only too well."

"I'm afraid she's very ill this morning, so we won't be able to travel back to Rumm to-day."

This was the merest try-on. And both of us knew it.

"I'm leaving in an hour's time."

"Perhaps Ali might go with you."

"Perhaps. But you'll go as well."

"But Gaudé's very ill."

However, I knew the form by now.

"I intend to leave at seven-thirty," I said, and went on shaving.

He sighed very deeply. Then he left.

At seven he reappeared and suggested we open the last tin of sausages so we could all eat them for breakfast. This I did. Nothing more was said about leaving. But by seven-thirty he had saddled the camels and we left. I was sad to say good-bye to gentle Ali, who walked for a while beside my camel to postpone the moment of parting. Sudan and I rode on in silence. I supposed he was thinking of his wife, Ageyle. I was still wondering whether it was Ageyle I had seen outside the tent at dawn. Was this the girl for whom we had urged forward our camels every hour of the way from Jafer? Was this the girl for whom he would risk disgrace? Was this the target of our journey?

For the girl I had glimpsed standing outside the tent was as ugly as sin.

The ground over which we travelled was strewn with heavy stones; and the camels moved slowly. In the distance I could see a flock of black sheep being driven out to pasture. At last Sudan broke the silence.

“Do you see that girl over there?”

I looked towards the flock and saw a black-clad shepherd girl.

“Yes.”

“That is my girl. My wife. Ageyle.”

He drove his camel towards her. For a moment I hesitated. He beckoned me to follow. As we approached, she turned away shyly. But he said something to her softly, which I could not understand; and slowly she turned round and looked up at us. She was slender and small and very young. As she stood there with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, gazing up at her man, she looked wildly attractive. I could understand what he felt. And I was happy as I said farewell, and turned away to leave them to say good-

bye. But he followed after me immediately, without a word to her. Perhaps their eyes said all that was needed.

I expected Sudan to be melancholy on the way home. But he was in high spirits, and caroled most of the way, urging me to sing with him:

“Eliad Eliad Eliadill yemma al Baidiye
Ya jorkh min fasalak lil helu sidriye
Tintain wurden sawa winte khalawiye.”

When we reached the place where Zeyala had bolted, he imitated what I looked like clinging on to the saddle, and laughed at the memory till the tears rolled down his cheeks. Suddenly he said with contentment, “I was with my wife all night,” and burst into song again.

We stopped to make tea before we reached the fort. I intended to travel to Maan by truck the next day, so this was our last trip together. I thanked him for my stay in his home, and gave him money to buy a present for his wife. I also gave him the small mirror I used for shaving, which I noticed he coveted. He observed his face frequently in it on the way to Rumm.

This evening after food in the fort, they sat discussing the difference between the life of a peasant and a bedu.

“It’s better to be a fellah, a peasant,” said Khalaf.

“Why?”

“You keep clean with lots of water. There’s food. There’s money. And there’s a school for your children.”

“But if you had money?”

“If I had money? I’d spend twenty days in Amman and twenty days in Damascus. Then I’d go back to

the desert for ten years. But, oh, what wonderful evenings those forty nights would be!"

"The bedu is happy," said Freh prosaically, "so long as he has a camel, a tent, and a wife. In that order."

Later Khalaf suggested that it would be good exercise for my Arabic, and interesting (he meant amusing) for them, if I rehearsed my trip from Damascus to the present day. So to please them I went through the hoops. Like children, they are a wonderful audience for a story, and laugh easily, particularly at anything grotesque like the old man in the sack.

As I reached to-day in my story, I looked up at the cliffs of Rumm towering above us, and I thought of the happiness I have known in this place.

I ended: "I've been very happy here. And thank you very much. To-morrow I must go back to Amman; and from Amman to Jerusalem; and from Jerusalem to Cairo; and from Cairo to Lindin. Because that's where my home is. And when I'm in Lindin I shall think of you all here. And I shall pray that you are happy."

I looked round the circle to press the evening in my memory. And as I looked at Sudan I saw that his eyes were full of tears.

If I could speak his tongue fluently, if I lived here many years, I wonder whether one day I should understand him. Perhaps I am still provincial, and expect my own reactions in other people. Exchange is complicated by different values; for I feel instinctively that though I could not trust him with a ten-shilling note, I could trust him with my life.

This morning it was Freh who brought me at seven a tiny kettle full of sweet tea and a piece of cold arbud. He told me that Sudan was preparing Gaude and Ashwa for departure to Mudawwara.

I found Sudan in the yard looking very woebegone, with his red head-cloth awry, and his circlet hanging down over his nose. In all, he said good-bye to me three times. Then he mounted Gaude and trotted away through the gate with the other two gindi who were travelling with him to Mudawwara. As they moved abreast down the slope to the north, he turned round in his saddle and sadly waved good-bye. But soon after he was out of sight I heard, echoing along the valley, the joyous strains of his song:

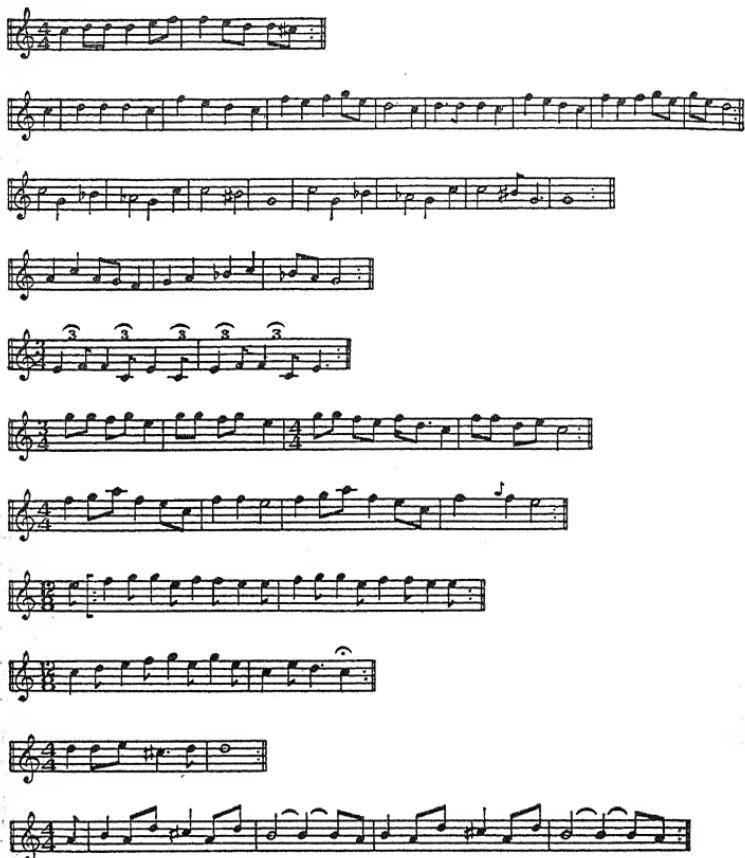
“Eliad Eliad Eliadill yemma al Baidiye
Ya jorkh min fasalak lil helu sidriye
Tintain wurden sawa winte khalawiye.”

XX

Amman glittered in the moonlight. After I had eaten I wandered through the narrow streets in the crisp evening air. I paused outside a coffee-house. The windows were misty from the hot, smoky room, but I could see inside. It was packed. Little tables were jammed close together, and every table was occupied by intent-looking men. I peered farther. A game was in progress at each table: cards, backgammon, chess or dominoes. A powerful radio screeched music from Cairo. Waiters squirmed from table to table. I looked again at the players: their faces were pasty and flabby,

their eyes were anxious, and their hands trembled eagerly about the pieces of their game. I turned away from the fetid, hectic scene to the moonlight folding the desert in peace.

In the morning I finished my notes. I waited until the dining-room at the Philadelphia hotel was empty; then I checked the songs I had written down in the desert.



XXI

I drove back to Jerusalem with Glubb. I was sad because I must return to England, and this was our last journey together. We talked of the future.

“ International law,” he said, “ is by its very name defeated. Yet apart from a few intellectuals in America what signs are there of even the beginnings of a willingness in people to abandon nationalism for a World State? The very men who told us for twenty-five years about the mistakes of Versailles are now engaged in making exactly the same mistakes. Unless we get a World State there will be a catastrophic war.”

We stopped at the frontier post by the Jordan bridge. I delayed him because I was a civilian.

“ We only read the peak periods in history,” he said when I came back to the car. “ If we could read seventh-century dog-Latin, I believe it would teach us that the whole of mankind was not wretched after the fall of Rome. In the same way, this war has brought misery to millions, but to other millions it has brought no change, and to some it has even brought an increase in prosperity.

“ If mankind fails to adapt in time to the atomic age, there will be war, but perhaps the cataclysm will not be so terrible as we suppose. Streets and cities will be destroyed. But probably an Arcadian kind of existence will survive. We’ve been led to believe that it was just a romantic poet’s fiction to suppose the Arcadian life was pleasant. I believe that it’s more likely that an Arcadian existence would be just as lovely as the poets make out.”

I said good-bye to him outside the King David Hotel. That evening Walid Khalidi, son of the Head of the Arab College, whom I had first visited in Jerusalem, showed me a poem he had written. It ended:

Sons of the desert
Dark sons with manly locks
Hawk eyed
Dark manly sons
Children
Of the unprogressive wilderness
Swamp these Western isles
Pour once again from
Where the sun shines
Choke up the channels of commerce
Cripple these searching cranes
Shatter their polygonal spectacles
Fling them back upon the land
Let them press the heaving soil
And cower at the brooding cloud
And bring them closer to the lonely trees
And spirit of the gloomy woods.

XXII

I have tried in this book to tell what I saw, rather than to preach what I thought because I am no Arabist, and my knowledge is precariously based on three years' experience. Since the day, however, when I was first allowed to travel alone (at the age of sixteen to Austria), I have had a yearning to travel. I am now thirty years old. I have spent half of the last fourteen years abroad. And what I feel about our Foreign Service is based on that experience.

It seems to me that our relationship with any foreign

country to-day is like a pyramid. At the top, diplomats meet, conveniently speaking an international language. A stratum lower, a few British merchants meet their foreign equivalents and discuss perhaps cotton or oil. In the next stratum—and already the distance between them is widening as the pyramid broadens towards its base, miles apart, separated by thick blocks of ignorance and prejudice, are the people—the factory workers, the farmers, the clerks and the tradesmen of Britain and of our neighbours who, to-day, are all the peoples of the world.

In the days before democracy gave power to the people, there was at least some logic in the pyramid relationship. For if the rulers agreed, their people could be made to agree. Yet in those days the diplomat had time to travel round a foreign country. Perhaps it was his love of riding or fishing which led him out on excursions. But the result was that he did meet a cross-section of the people. To-day, outside the totalitarian pall, the people have power to elect their government, therefore, whereas previously it was important for a diplomat to get to know the people of a foreign land, it is now essential. But since the invention of the telephone and cable, the diplomat is more than ever chained to his desk by signals and papers from White-hall. He should have more time to get to know a foreign people; in fact, he has less. And his every action is checked and controlled by London so that he loses initiative. He no longer needs to be resourceful; he needs to be an efficient clerk. And another type begins to be chosen for the Service. This type thinks he understands the mentality of a country by dining with a few rich merchants; he surrounds himself with an artificial reproduction of the little bit of England that he knew:

and golf clubs, cosy teas and pretty dances spring into life on a foreign soil. Thus our officials are often isolated from any *real* contact with a foreign people by their parochial outlook, by their snobbery, and by their lack of initiative.

In the Arab countries second-rate personnel, insulated by their snobbery from friendship with Arabs, is fatal to our policy. For the Arab is more interested in personality than in policy. The man, to him, is the Government. That is why when we have had men of high purpose with integrity and love of the Arabs, such as Lawrence, Cornwallis and Glubb, we have prospered, while with regular diplomats we have failed. That is why the soldier and the general, who live closer to the realities of hunger and death, make better ambassadors than the sedate clerk or the Minister.

I spent a week in Jerusalem meeting friends from the Centre for Arab Studies. Then I flew to Cairo, where the students of the University had started an anti-British riot. At the Embassy I met an over-worked diplomat. Sweat dripped down his haggard face as he tried to explain down the telephone to a Pasha's wife why she could not have priority on a plane to London. He turned to me with a sigh.

“There's a riot on, you know,” he said.

“So I see.”

“I went and saw the rioters yesterday.”

“What did they have to say?”

“Oh, I didn't talk to them. I walked up as far as the police barriers and had a look at them on the roof tops.”

Yesterday there had been an ugly fight between the students and the police. One student had been killed

and many wounded. The Cairo police force was commanded by a wise and just Englishman who acted under orders. The students, however, could not be expected to appreciate this. So later I went with a friend to the University Hospital. If you walk up to a barrier in Cairo as if you were certain you were going to be allowed through, you get through. We walked quickly along the crowded, bustling corridors, past beds strewn with orange peel and relatives, so that it was hard to tell which was the patient, until we reached the great ward where the young wounded lay surrounded by their comrades and relatives. The student leader insisted on showing me round every bed. And as I looked at the boys who had their heads split open and those who lay in agony because their groins had been kicked in as they lay on the ground, I remembered friends of the same age before the war in England, students who left to fight their crusade in Spain when perhaps they should have stayed with their books. And I remembered that their wounds only strengthened their views and ours. So it seemed to me cruelly stupid to use force as an argument.

"That one," they whispered to me, "that one nearest the wall, he will die."

I looked down at a boy with thick, woolly hair and wide eyes. Sweat streamed down his dark hairy chest. He stared up at us.

"You will see," he said feebly, "until there is complete evacuation of the English, we students will never give in. We will fight the English while there is life still in our bodies."

"Do you hate the English people?" I asked him.

"Oh, no. Not the English people. There should be great friendship between Egyptian and English people."

Why do not English young men, English students, why do they not try to understand us?"

The students clustered round us in the ward, and we stayed for quite long talking to them. But I am certain we did not alter their opinions by one jot. "Evacuation of the British. Sudan and Egypt—one country," they repeated dogmatically. But their surprising friendliness and eagerness for discussion made me certain that, if instead of being smugly aloof, some young diplomat had taken the trouble to know those students, and to talk to them in friendship and equality, the riots would not have spread.

The days of direct control of the Middle East countries are past. The "despotic father" type of British administrator is no longer required. The Arab lands are independent. Our interest in the security of our communications can best be served by offering, within the next few years, Englishmen who can act as advisers and technical experts, and by producing diplomats who can persuade rather than dominate. This means they must know, understand, and be friends with the people of the country where they work. Above all, this means they must treat Arabs as equals and not as children or social inferiors.

The Centre of Arab Studies was planned in order to train a handful of young men from the Services who could become advisers throughout the Middle East. Those of us who struggled to get it started believed that it was the Centre's job to produce friends and counsellors rather than despotic bureaucrats. We believed further that some of the men from the Centre should

return to England. For the British citizen must appreciate our interests and duties in the Middle East if he is to countenance the cost. And then perhaps, we said, our responsibility will be fulfilled.

We have brought the cheap trapping of our civilization to Islam, now let us bring the best of our culture and of our traditions. And let us send doctors who can not only teach medicine but, by working with the Effendis, bring health to the peasants. Let us send out young lawyers who can teach not only knowledge but wisdom. Let us send out business men who, rather than encourage the Pashas to grow rich by maltreating children till they grow blind by their hard labour in the carpet factories, will explain the ethics of trade and the reward of welfare. Let us send out statesmen who will show by their own actions not only the value of power but of prestige.

For if we do this, then the Arab peoples, united and strong, will be a force for peace and will take their rightful place of complete equality in the congress of nations.

But the Foreign Office now controls the Centre which has been changed into a language school.

XXIII

The plane flew low over the Western Desert, and I could see the wadis along which our tanks advanced, the escarpments which sheltered us and the peaks we gained. And I could see like trim rows of dots in the desert the wooden crosses of the dead. Because it has been abused by charlatans we shy away from the ques-

tion of what we the living can make of their sacrifice.

As I stared down at the dark plains of sand stretching to the horizon, I tried to think what the men I knew who died in the desert would ask of us who survived. My mind turned back five years, and I remembered the heat and the danger and the agony. Would they ask for self-sacrifice? I could not hear in any of their voices the call to further pain. I remembered the fighting. I saw the tanks bursting into flame as the squadron advanced, and I recalled the courage of the crews. Courage in building a new world. Perhaps that was it. I tried to remember talk of politics and the future. Already I was beginning to hear the voices of the men as they sprawled in their bivouac.

“Where’s Rommel to-night?”

“Up your Aunt Fanny.”

“Where’s the brew?”

“By your mucking foot.”

“Who’s on guard?”

“Nobby.”

“That’s right. Pick on me.”

“It’s your turn.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t, did I?”

“He’s so sharp he could cut himself.”

“He’ll do more than cut himself when he’s on guard.”

“Muck off.”

“Brew up. Brew up.”

“Brew up yourself.”

“All right. Keep your hair on.”

The voices went on speaking. The conversation was meaningless. Then I began to see the men who were talking. They looked much alike in their heavy boots and khaki shorts. They were lean and unshaven and

tired. But there was a look in their eyes which I had not noticed before. It was a mixture of confidence and affection as they joked with each other. I began to distinguish the men leaning on their packs in the dim light of the oil-lamp. Two of them, I remembered, were clerks from London. There was a miner from Wales. There was a lawyer, a commercial traveller, and a carpenter. They came from every class. Then I understood the look in their eyes. It was comradeship. At that moment I saw their answer to the question, and I tried to listen to the intention of their words rather than to each phrase they spoke.

"We don't understand economics," I think they would have said in effect. "Nor much about politics, come to that. We've not had much chance to learn. But there's one thing we do know about because we've proved it. We know it's wrong for people to be divided by barriers of wealth or class or speech. We know it's wrong for one man to set himself above another just because he's got a lot of money or talks different. We know this because we come from every kind of job ourselves. We'd never have got to know each other back home. But out here we've learned to get on together. We've learned that the only definition of a gentleman is a man who treats every other man as a gentleman. Comradeship is what we've proved. Comradeship is what we'd like to see carried on."

Then I thought of us in England creeping back to our ruts. I thought of the privileged clinging to their advantages like an ageing woman to her charms. I thought of the lip-service we pay to equality while our system of education deliberately creates different classes.

Should the British Empire be lost, the historian will

have good reason to ascribe its decline and fall to snobbery. The Arab countries are backward, but the bedouin knows more of the spirit of democracy than we do. For he believes he is the equal of the Emir and of his slave, because all are equally brothers in Islam.

XXIV

As the plane droned through the darkness over Europe, I remembered the slow ship crossing the equator on the voyage home three years ago. I saw the green sack slip with a tiny splash into the sea: I felt the sticky warm breeze fanning my cheeks as I lay on deck in the moonlight longing for the end of my journey, yet afraid to look ahead.

It is still uncomfortable to look ahead. There would be hope if we could believe that a new code would be given to the world, a new morality by which mankind could live in happiness, a new creed which would change the way man lives to ways of love and beauty. But for thousands of years Commandments have been given to men; religions have been revealed; and all their prophets consider the individual, proclaiming that the spirit is more important than the flesh, putting freedom before wealth. Yet we daily contribute more power to the State, surrendering more of our liberty in the hope of greater comfort. And only a few are free to make the decision between freedom and comfort. Therein lies the most bitter inequality.

“The slaves of domestic tyranny,” said Gibbon, “may vainly exult in their national independence: but the Arab is personally free.” In the choice between

freedom and comfort, the bedouin chooses freedom. For the sake of his freedom he is willing to live barely; and the sheikh in his tent will turn his blue lips to the winter wind, saying, "That is my liberty." Perhaps we, who have drawn our carpets and cathedrals from the desert, have forgotten the message of the wild men crying in the wilderness, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

THE END